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The coming of the Kingdom : and other sermons

The Coming of the Kingdom

THE
Coming of the Kingdom
And Other Sermons

BY THE
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To My Children

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But His triumph-day is breaking, and we hail it with a song.

In the fading of the starlight we can see the coming morn,
And the lights of men are paling in the splendours of the dawn;
For the eastern skies are glowing as with light of hidden fire,
And the hearts of men are stirring with the throbs of deep desire.

There's a hush of expectation, and a quiet in the air,
And the breath of God is moving in the fervent breath of prayer;
For the suffering, dying Jesus is the Christ upon the throne,
And the travail of our spirit is the travail of His own.

He is breaking down the barriers, He is casting up the way,
He is calling for His angels to build up the Gates of Day;
But His angels here are human, not the shining hosts above,
For the drum-beats of His army are the heart-beats of our love.

Hark! we hear a distant music, and it comes with fuller swell!
'Tis the triumph-song of Jesus, of our King, Immanuel!
Zion, go ye forth to meet Him! And, my soul, be swift to bring
All thy sweetest and thy dearest for the triumph of our King!

The Coming of the Kingdom

I

THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

Thy kingdom come.—MATT. vi. 10.

IN studying the words of Jesus, while we marvel at His speech—for never man spake like this Man—we wonder, too, at His silences, the subjects He passes over altogether, or to which He only gives a casual reference. He says very little about heaven, or the heavenly life; but He says a great deal about the life which now is, the responsibilities and duties of this To-day. On ecclesiastical and political questions He is silent; while on those mysteries of Nature, which are giving up their secrets to patient research, He throws not the light of one solitary word. But there was one subject which was to Jesus all-commanding and all-absorbing;

it was the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God. This was ever in His thoughts. He could not get away from it; and if at times His speech soared up to those infinities and eternities of God, it comes round and down again, as the doves return from their sky-flights to their cotes, to its starting-place and home within the kingdom. Over a hundred times does this word appear in the Gospels, and nearly all His parables are portrayals of that kingdom in some of its many aspects. And now, as Jesus teaches His disciples of all ages to pray, before He allows us to ask one petition for ourselves, even that necessity of our daily bread, He bids us pray, Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Let us inquire first:

What is this Kingdom for which we pray? It will be noticed that Jesus uses the expressions interchangeably—the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. But at the same time He speaks of it as being peculiarly His own kingdom. He puts Himself in its pivotal centre. With all possible naturalness He gathers up its royalties and wraps them about His own person. He speaks of it as 'My kingdom'; and this, not in familiar discourse with His disciples, but when before Pilate, face to face

with the representative of earth's greatest Power. Nor is this personal 'My' some chance or figurative word, which may mean much or little; it is the crucial word of the sentence, emphasized by a three-fold repetition, the word He will not strike out or alter, even to save Himself from the cross. And this is what the Psalms and Prophecies had foretold, and what the announcing angel had declared, 'He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end.' Given Him of the Father it is, but the kingdom is His, absolutely, inalienably; nor is there any admittance within that kingdom except through Him who is the Way and the Truth. We enter the kingdom, or the kingdom enters into us, as we find and we worship the King, sanctifying in our hearts 'Christ as Lord.'

And so Jesus says, My kingdom is not of this world. It is not built on worldly lines. Earthly kingdoms are built up by force, founded upon power; My kingdom is founded upon love, its only forces righteousness and truth. Earthly kingdoms have outward, visible symbols, flags, coins, armies, and well-defined frontiers. My 'kingdom cometh not with observation,' with outward show and visible signs. My kingdom,

or the kingdom of God, is within you, internal rather than external. It seeks not countries but consciences; it rules the life by regulating the will; for its realm is the heart, in that silent hinterland, the great interior of the soul. And this explains why the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are convertible terms, expressing the same thought and fact; for what is the kingdom of God in heaven but His eternal rule over the spirits of redeemed men and unredeemed angels? and what are the harmonies of heaven but the harmonies of surrendered wills, as, without any break or discord, they strike in with the divine Will in absolute precision? And so it is the kingdom of heaven set up on earth, as the spirits of men not yet made perfect are surrendered to, and possessed by, the Supreme Spirit, which is God Himself. This brings us to a further question:

What is the Manner of its coming? Jesus Himself indicates this in the two companion pictures He draws for us—the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven. The two parables, with minor differences, are one in their import. Both speak of its ultimate triumph when its mission is accomplished; and both emphasize the fact that these large growths and perfections

will spring out of obscure and small beginnings. And such is the coming of the kingdom of God, whether to the individual or to the world; for the soul of man, the individual soul, is the protoplasm, the germ-cell out of which the world-kingdom is evolved. The mass is leavened only by the leavening of the separate units. Take some perfected Christian life; for the Church of all ages has grown its saints, and it will continue to grow them—often, too, in unlikely places. Fogazzaro finds his saint, Benedetto, in the cloisters and garden of a Benedictine monastery. But saints are indigenous to all climates and all soils; and they grow out in the open, or by the common walks of life, just as well as by the south wall of a sanctuary or convent. But how was that experience gained? that lofty eminence of saintliness attained? It was no endowment of a capricious fortune; it was no sudden outburst into bloom, like Aaron's blossoming rod, which can flower and fruit in a night. No: there are years of patient struggle here—years of wrestling with foes without and an imperious Self within. The highlands of God, the sunny crests of the Delectable Mountains, are not ours by any lot, or chance, or law of heredity; nor can we soar to them on wings, nor float up to them on dreams;

they can only be reached by hard climbing, the slow but firm foot of a persistent endeavour. It is the Excelsior step that does it.

Not only does the Christian life advance by growths and steps, which in themselves are small and almost inappreciable, but it has its obscure and small beginnings. There was a time in the experience of your saint, as in the experience of us all, when our Christian life was but a thought, circling in the sky-spaces of the mind like the lone dove of the deluge—a thought about our being or our destiny, about our sin and our Saviour. Then this thought grew into a desire, the desire into a prayer, and the prayer shot upwards into a life. Such always are the beginnings of the kingdom of God within the soul; it comes softly, gently, silently, like the coming of the spring, or the breaking of a dawn. Yes, and very often in the wonderful ways of God it is some little thing that leads us up to that strait but Beautiful Gate, by which we pass into His kingdom. Jesus called Saul by a blinding light; but when He summoned His disciples it was by two simple, commanding words. And what was it turned us round to Christ—that made us look up from the nets we were mending to our Saviour? It was but a little thing, maybe:

a word whispered in the ear, a wayside song that was floating in the air, a grasp of the hand, a tear, a look, a letter from a friend, a leaflet tract dropped by a stranger. Verily, the gates of heaven are high, no human ladder can scale them; and they are strong, no human power can force them; but they swing round on little hinges, and they are so lightly hung that the touch of a child or the vibration of a solitary word can open them!

And now, if we take the wider outlook, it is in the same quiet, unostentatious ways the kingdom of God is set up in the world. Daniel prophesied, 'In those days shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom,' and this kingdom he likens to a stone cut out of the mountain without hands, and which, rolling on, 'became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.' And such was the advent of Christianity. Among the solitudes of Galilee the movement begins. Dressed in a peasant garb the Man of Nazareth goes forth. Choosing the lowlier walks of life, He leaves behind Him parables of beauty and miracles of power. He does not strive, nor cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. Quietly, on the lake-side, or on the mountain's grassy slope, He opens His lips. He discourses

about common things—sparrows, lilies, grass, wheat, sheep of the fold, birds of the air. He courts not the great and noble, but fishermen are His followers, while little children He lifts up in His arms. Surrounded by His 'little ones,' as He calls them, His 'little flock,' He lives His brief, itinerant life of three years, and then dies a tragic, ignominious death. And what is accomplished? Not much, if you count numbers; for of the chosen twelve one betrays Him, one denies Him, and the ten desert Him when He needs them most. Look at Christianity in its humble and feeble origins, and say if in human reason there is in it one element of success? Its founder the despised Nazarene, without patronage or home; its doctrines unwelcome, its symbol a Cross of shame, its first heralds these rustics of Galilee. You ask, 'Is this the system which is to outgrow and overshadow all others, which will yet challenge and conquer the Empire, destroying its mythologies and surviving its philosophies?' It certainly does not look very formidable. Indeed, it is such an insignificant movement the Roman state scarcely deigns to notice it; and Gamaliel thinks that if it be only left alone it may die a natural and early death. Ah, the little stone cut out of the mountain has

started on its course; nor will that course be stayed until Judaism, paganism, and all the 'isms' which in its blindness the world has set up are broken to pieces, and become as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor! See it in its career of triumph, its rapid and constant advances! It threads its way along the rivers, climbs the barren mountains, traverses inhospitable and dangerous seas, and nothing can stay its course. The thunder of imperial decrees cannot alarm it; bitter persecutions cannot arrest it; but it gives up its martyrs by the thousand, and moves on. It has temporary defeats, and organizes out of them more splendid victories. It has its own defections and betrayals, the Judases who sell, and the Peters who deny the truth; but, giving tears and prayers for the lapsed and fallen, it moves on. Through western Asia, northern Africa, and through Europe, to its farthest Spain and Britain, the new Faith wins its way, until the Empire which has conquered the world itself is conquered.

Come with me to Nice, in Bithynia—the same Bithynia where Paul once assayed to go, and, as we read, 'the Spirit of Jesus suffered him not.' It is but little more than three hundred years since the first memorable Pentecost, and to-day

a great religious Council is held, the Council which gave us the Nicene Creed. Over three hundred ecclesiastics are here, from the near and the remote provinces of the Empire, even from distant Britain. Seated in a semi-circle, in front of them is a costly table, on which are placed four small rolls of parchment, the four Gospels out of which this great movement has grown. Right in front of the Council, and behind this table, folding doors are opened, and a man of fine, handsome features and imperial presence enters. It is the Emperor Constantine. The whole assembly rises, and salutes their monarch; but Constantine kneels reverently beside the table on which lie the four simple Gospels of the Evangelists; so prostrating himself in homage, as he lays himself and his Empire at the feet of the all-conquering Christ. It is simply marvellous, yes, miraculous in this sense, that it cannot be explained by any formulas that earthly science or human wisdom can frame. No force has been employed; there has been no organized plan, and but little of concerted action. It has been mainly an impromptu movement, as men have followed some divinely-given impulse, receiving their inspirations and directions from the Holy Spirit Himself, that 'Spirit of Jesus'

which ever inspires and guides His Church, and which builds up the kingdom of God out of the surrendered lives of men.

But great as were the triumphs of these first three centuries, the days of the Apostles and the Fathers, the triumphs of this last century can surpass them; and never were the advances of the kingdom so rapid, and never had it such signal victories as are being witnessed to-day. The world's atmosphere to-day is ozoned by Christian thought; while the electric thrills of a Christian love are sweeping over all lands and quickening all peoples. It was the touch of the Christ which awoke Japan from the sleep and torpor of centuries; and the touch of the Christ is rapidly overcoming the immobility and inertia of China. Never were Christian agencies so multiplied and so efficient; and when some Luke writes our modern Acts of the Apostles, it will show a devotion and heroism equal to anything in those ancient records, while in results it will show successes and triumphs which far surpass them. The Church Missionary Society—which is but one of the hundred and fifty-nine Societies represented in the Edinburgh Conference—is baptizing twenty-six converts every day of the year. Methodism, which is the youngest of the

sisterhood of churches, is dedicating four new sanctuaries with every setting of the sun, and in our mission fields it is our large successes which form our embarrassment; the reapers are too few, and our barns too small for the abundant harvest.

We are indeed living in a pregnant age. These are the days of the Son of Man, days of great opportunity and of wonderful promise. When you see the snowdrops and the crocuses smiling above the sodden earth, you know that the spring is nigh, that the winter is over and gone, and the time of the singing of birds has come. But not more surely do these flowers herald the coming of the spring than do the signs of the times speak of the coming of the King. His couriers are already here. The way of the Lord is being prepared, every valley exalted, the mountains and hills brought low, the crooked made straight and the rough places plain, that the glory of the Lord may be revealed. Yes, the King is coming to reign in righteousness, and

> Arabia's desert ranger
> To Him shall bow the knee;
> The Ethiopian stranger
> His glory come to see;

With offerings of devotion
Ships from the isles shall meet,
To pour the wealth of ocean
In tribute at His feet!

This brings us to our last thought, namely, *The claims and demands of the kingdom upon us.* The advances of the kingdom are made, and its victories won, by the allied forces of heaven and earth; and chief among these forces or influences, in every conversion, are these three: the Divine Spirit, the living Word, and the human instrument. It is essentially the work of God, as in each new creation the Spirit of God moves upon the face of the waters, creating life and light, and out of its chaos bringing in order, beauty, and paradise. But the Divine Spirit always makes use of the living Word and the human instrument. And so in the kingdom-parables it is the hand of a man that casts the mustard-seed into the garden; and it is the hand of a woman hides the leaven in the meal. You see, there must be the mediation of the human hand; and God's kingdom comes on earth, not in any ways of chance, or by any angelic ministry—it comes only through a human instrumentality. The Ark of God ever rests on human shoulders, and it moves forward

only as its bearers step together, and step out; and all its advances are timed and measured by the human foot. The leaven spreads by contact and assimilation; and the leaven of the gospel spreads in no other way, save as hand grasps hand, as heart touches heart, and life influences life. The kingdom of God is a democracy; each citizen has voice and vote and influence—how much or how far-reaching we never know. And so many of the advances of the kingdom have come in quiet ways, through humble toilers whose names are written in heaven, but of which earth has no record. The light of the motor-car always travels in advance of the lamp; and the light of the Church has always gone in advance of its organization, sweeping the wide and ever-extending horizons. How came the gospel to Rome? We do not know; but before its first apostle comes, with a chain upon his hand, we see a rare constellation, a galaxy of illustrious names and shining lives set in that dark pagan sky. How came the gospel into Britain? The golden-mouthed Chrysostom in Constantinople once thrilled his hearers by the tidings, 'Britain now possesses the truth.' But how that truth first came, and who brought it, we cannot say; for the truth was here, hidden in some hearts and

lives before Augustine and his monks chanted their way to Canterbury; before the torch of St. Patrick lighted up the shores of Erin; or Columba and his northern lights illumined from Iona the horizon of Scotland.

So does the kingdom of God come to earth; not with observation, with noise and clamour, but silently as a dawn. And that kingdom looks to us now for its further and ultimate triumph. When Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, proclaims his universal salvation, 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,' he goes on to ask some very pertinent questions. 'How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?' And to the apostle's questions we might well add one other, 'How shall they be sent except as *we* send them?' So this kingdom demands from us, and from all of us, these three things: our gifts, our prayers, and our personal service; for the honour of the kingdom and the advances of the kingdom God has left in our hands; and these advances will be measured by the intensity of our love, the fervour of our prayer, and the largeness of our gifts. Shall we not then pray,

'Thy kingdom come,' and living and giving as we pray, seek a redeemed world for Christ? And should some heavenly voice or vision ask for the greater sacrifice, we will not hesitate; but, calling to mind His sacrifice of the Cross, our burning heart shall answer, 'Yes, Lord!' and our lips, touched with the sacred fire, shall say, 'Here am I, send me!'

II

OTHER-SIDEDNESS

II

OTHER-SIDEDNESS

Let us pass over unto the other side.—MARK iv. 35.

THE Sea of Galilee—or Sea of Tiberias, as St. John calls it—fills up a large space in the Gospel story. Its western shore offered Jesus a home for the three wonderful years; from its dense population He drew most of His disciples, and the most of His parables were uttered and His miracles wrought in its near neighbourhood. And so the sea looms up large in the Gospels, with ocean breadths and depths, and limitless horizons. And yet it was no sea at all; it was only a small lake about the size of Windermere, thirteen miles in length and six miles broad at its widest reach. It is somewhat singular that St. Luke never calls it a 'sea.' He has been tossed about on the wider Mediterranean, and so he always speaks of it as a lake; by his smaller word giving it its true proportions. Jesus has just finished His remark-

able discourse, as, sitting in Simon's boat, He has spoken His parables to the crowds who have thronged the shore; and now, as the setting sun is dropping behind the Galilean hills, He gives the command of our text, that they cross over to the other side. How the storm met them on the way, and how the demoniacs met them as they came to land, the sequel shows.

Taking the words of our text first in *their literal, geographical meaning*, we shall find that the two sides of the lake, though near in point of distance, offer a striking contrast. The Galilean shore rose from the lake in gentle gradations, opening upon the fertile plain of Gennesaret, now green in the flower-spangled verdure of the spring, and now brown or white with its ripening harvests. Then, more steeply, it climbed up to the hills of the interior, where Mount Tabor had its transfiguration of glory, and Mount Hattin set the Beatitudes echoing through the world. And so the western side was an idyllic picture on which the eye loved to rest, a shore of beauty and of teeming life. The other, the Gadarene side, offered a singular contrast. Here the mountains stood close up by the lake, rugged and precipitous, with here and there a steep place, where the possessed swine

could easily rush down to their fatal plunge. Gloomy and forbidding, the Gadarene shore offered no generous welcome, only an occasional landing-place, where some steep path led up the mountain side to the highland of the Decapolis. The shores of Galilee were kindly and benign. In their sweet scenes Jesus found His parables. You see the sower going forth to sow; you hear the bleating of the flocks and the songs of the reaper; the very birds, which had no storehouse or barn, sang the providence of God; while the lilies of Galilee rang their golden bells to call men from their cares and fears into a Sabbath of peace and rest. Gadara gives us no such pictures. There is an air of desolation about it; and though Jesus once did multiply the loaves on its northern uplands, that bread had not grown in its fields, for the place, so we read, was desert. The only life these Gospels show us of Gadara are this two thousand herd of swine, and the husks which the swine did eat—for this is probably the 'far country' of the parable, where the prodigal hungered, and no man gave unto him. Galilee gave Jesus all His apostles—if we except Iscariot — with bands of disciples and of ministering women, who were glad to give for their Master either their substance or their

life. Gadara gives Him no disciple, save this healed demoniac; and when he fain would follow Him Jesus forbids it, and sends him back home. Galilee gives to Jesus a royal welcome; crowds the shore to meet Him; presses upon Him to touch His garment, and even seeks by force to make Him king. Gadara gives Him no welcome; her crowds are hostile; the swinish people only grunt their displeasure, as in angry tones they bid Him depart out of their coasts. And He did; He took them at their word, leaving them, never to return.

Such is the difference between this side and the other, between Galilee and Gadara. You could scarcely imagine that they were neighbouring shores; they seem to stand apart as the poles, in some far antipodes. And whether our life has a Galilean or a Gadarene aspect, all depends upon our attitude and relation to Christ. If there is a real and sincere welcome in our heart for Christ; if we receive Him gladly; if we make much of Him, then the great Light which broke over Galilee of the nations will break over our life, the light of unsetting suns, even the Light of the Lamb, and we shall learn to keep perpetual Sabbath. But if the Christ is unwelcome; if we care more for our illicit

pleasures or illicit gains than we care for Him, and we bid Him depart out of our coasts, He may take us at our word. But then, with all its pretence of freedom, and all its make-believes of happiness and mirth, our life will only be the far country of the swineherd, with its sore straits and its keen soul-hunger, which nothing but a Father's love can satisfy.

So much, then, for the geography of our text; and now we will take it in its suggestive meaning, as we consider *the other-sidedness of things in general*. The Lake of Galilee is not the only thing which has two sides, for when we come to think of it we cannot find anything which is only one-sided; it must have two sides, it may have three, or a hundred. There is a wonderful law of duality running through the natural world, linking things in pairs, so that either by its likeness or its unlikeness and oppositeness, the one suggests the other. You find this law written in the very first sentence of scripture, as 'God created the heaven and the earth'; while its note is struck again and again in this first chapter of Genesis. Light and darkness, day and night, evening and morning, sun and moon, waters under the firmament and waters above the firmament—such is the pendulum swing, as the in-

spired hand of the historian describes the circle of God's creative acts. And the series finds its culmination in that last and greatest creation, man, as we read, 'Male and female created He them.' But when we read 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him,' the Hebrew expression is not simply a helpmeet, as we compress and accent it. It means one who is over against him—his counterpart, or other self. Just so, you cannot have a world without two hemispheres, each the complement and opposite of the other, bound by invisible chains to one centre, but having its seasons reversed, looking off into different skies, with new constellations shining overhead. And so, no matter how powerful our telescopes, we only see one side of the heavens. But the other side is there, even if we do not see it—boundless fields of space, skies as deep and blue as ours, and all set thick with stars, the golden asters of the Father's garden.

Or if we look at ourselves, we are, like Austro-Hungary, a sort of dual monarchy, two men beaten or compressed into one. We are all of us, like Janus, two-faced; that is, the two sides of the face never correspond, or at least they are never exactly alike. You perhaps do not see any

difference, but the photographer does; and as he poses you for a three-quarter face, it will be the face on its best, its more perfect side. Indeed, the whole body is built up in duplicate, with a right side and a left. There is but one heart, but even this is two-lobed, while all our organs of sense are doubled; two nostrils, two eyes, two ears, and two hands. The sense of taste seems to be an exception; but even here the dual element comes in, as taste is the joint function of the tongue and the palate. Each hand is the opposite of the other; not in any antagonistic way, but each as the other's double, or better half. So too with our sight. Each eye covers its own field of vision, each different from the other; but the two images, blending into one, give you a wider angle, and depths which the single vision cannot give—depths which are wanting in a photograph, but which the twin lenses of the stereoscope bring out with wonderful clearness.

Here, then, we find a key which helps to explain the wonderful diversity of thought and opinion which we find everywhere, whether in philosophy, politics, or religion. It is because we see most clearly our own side of things, the side which is nearest to us; while others look

from a different standpoint. So certain things come within our vision which do not come into theirs; as, conversely, some things come into theirs which do not appear in ours. And yet both readings, with all their variants, may be correct. And so your different schools of philosophy, your opposing parties in politics, your rival creeds and churches in religion, are all the outworking of the same law—the law of other-sidedness, the law which makes uniformity impossible, and which, breaking up all monotonies and monopolies, puts into the world of thought that infinite variety which God has put in the realm of nature. The party spirit may become too pronounced, seeding off into dangerous and demoralizing excesses; but there is a divineness about our political parties. They are both natural and necessary; for as the bird cannot rise without its counterpoise of wings, each the opposite of the other, and striking out in an opposite direction, so a nation cannot advance steadily and safely without its balance of parties. They both seem just as essential to a people's progress and life as the centripetal and centrifugal forces are necessary to give our earth its beautiful elliptic movement round the sun. There must be a Left, if there is a Right

in politics; for if either one is wanting there will be no gracefulness of motion, no evenness of progress; it will be only the unequal, limping gait of a lame man, or some helpless, tragic fall.

Religion, too, presents the same phenomena of other- or many-sidedness, and in a somewhat accentuated form. To a cursory thought these endless differences seem a disfiguring mark on the fair face of Religion, and an argument against the divineness of her mission. But a clearer, deeper thought will see in these differences but the outworking of a law which, as we have seen, is universal and divine. For when we come to inspect and measure these differences they are generally very slight—only different words, or phrases, or forms. The underlying verities, the deep bed-rock, are the same; it is only on the surface they begin their variations, here dropping into a valley or a plain, and there standing out a prominent hill. The things which unite are far more and far greater than the things which divide. The unity of the faith is something more than a euphemism, a pleasant-sounding phrase; it is a deep and great reality, knitting its many members into one body, and binding together, in bonds invisible indeed, but indissoluble, the one Holy Catholic Church

throughout all the world. For why should we see eye to eye in all things? in the little things? It is not natural, it is not desirable, that we should. We look from different standpoints; the angles of our vision vary; and though we may be looking on the same truth, we see it in a changed aspect, with slightly altered relations. Our word 'rival' comes from *rivus*, a river; and they were rivals who dwelt on opposite sides of the same river. Their cross-vision of things led to cross-purposes and jealousies, until their rivalry became hostility. We are rivals in that early sense. We do not occupy the same ground; we look in different directions, one towards the east, and one towards the west. To one the river flows to the right, while to us it flows to the left; but what matters it when it is one and the same River of God, flowing on and out to the infinite seas? What matters it when overhead are God's deep heavens, where east and west, our little points of division, meet and lose themselves in the cerulean blue?

Heaven's sunlight cannot all pass within our restricted vision. What is seen is but a microscopical point compared with the infinite unseen; and the widening circles of our knowledge do but make vaster the circle of our ignorance.

Besides, truth does not lie in straight lines, but in spheres. God's truth, like His worlds, is round and large, and you cannot possibly see both its hemispheres at once. If one is clearly visible, you may be sure there is another side you do not see lying off in the shade. We look down our own meridian line, others look down theirs; but they are convergent looks, finding some northern or southern pole where they meet and blend. So there is room on these wide, large worlds for many dialects, and the shibboleths of a provincial speech. There is a pathetic sigh in Tennyson's voice, which finds a vibrating chord in our own hearts, when he sings—

> I cannot help it, but at times
> They seem to me too narrow,
> All the faiths of this grown world of ours.

And too narrow indeed they are; for can we by searching find out God to perfection? Can we fathom the depths of His wisdom, or measure the thunders of His power? Ah, we see but darkly here, our very brightest visions giving us but 'parts of His ways.' We cut out and piece together our little creeds, but they are nothing more than the swaddling-bands of some child-Christ. To make a fitting robe for the real

Christ, one befitting His high dignities and glories, we shall want ampler spaces than our thought can reach, with the gold of all the sunsets and the blue of all the skies; for

> Our little systems have their day,
> They have their day and cease to be;
> They are but broken lights of Thee,
> And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.

And so we want to remember the other side, and to go over to it frequently; and as in finding distances by triangulation we need the measured base and two separate angles, so we need to change our standpoint to get the true distances, the true proportion and perspective of things. Perplexing things, yes, and vexing things will often arise, throwing us into a flurry of excitement or heat of passion; but if we pause a little, and, shifting our theodolite, we look on the provocative action or word from the standpoint of another, we shall get a truer vision; and possibly we may find in the action we had misunderstood a well-intended kindness. There are two sides to all questions, often many more, and how things look depends on how we look at them. We may have our own opinion, and we may hold it tenaciously, but we should not be intolerant of

the opinions of others. But some people are so one-sided, and so infallible, that they deem all who have a different opinion as heretics; and, borrowing the ways of the Vatican, they excommunicate them with bell, book, and candle.

Lastly, we need to look at *the other side of Providence*. Jesus once bade His disciples to go to the other side alone; and when they hesitated to leave Him, He 'constrained' them, as we read. And as they rowed, the dark and the terrible storm came on. The other shore, the safe shore, was lost in the inky blackness of the night, till they were sore wearied and sore afraid. But the fourth watch came, and Jesus came with it; and when He came the waves were all hushed, the winds stilled in a great calm, and almost before they knew it they were on the safe shore, at home. So is it sometimes with us. There seems to be no other side but of storm and cloud, and we toil in rowing against the contrary winds. But there is an upper side, a heavenly side to our cloud, if we could only see it. I once saw thrown on the screen a photograph of the clouds, which was taken from a balloon when high above them; and those clouds, which on their lower, earthly side were dull, dark, depressing, now, seen from above, were like fields of virgin snow, flash-

ing and sparkling beneath an unclouded sun. The clouds were transfigured, with a heavenly brightness on them, and a heavenly calm about them. Yes, and if we could but project ourselves, as we may do in our thought and the reaches of our faith, above the clouds which now obscure our vision, and which chill and drench us, we should see a whole heaven of light and love. And beyond our clouds is the safe, glad shore of eternal rest and eternal joy, where one sweet Sabbath is ever breaking over the celestial hills. There on that other side we shall find ample compensations for all earth's toil and travail; solutions of all those enigmas which have perplexed and distressed us here, and 'Heaven will make perfect this imperfect life.' That shore and that Sabbath wait for us all, and they will be ours in God's good time.

III

THE WORD OF GOD

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THE WORD OF GOD

The seed is the Word of God.—LUKE viii. 11.

IN these seven monosyllabic words Jesus gives us the key to the Parable of the Sower. He tells us that the kingdom of God on earth, as its many and wide fields ripen their perennial harvests, is the resultant effect of one silent but potent force; and that this germinant, vitalizing force is none other than the Word of God. The seed is divine, but the sower is human; for the Word of God itself can only be vocalized and operant as it is distributed by human agencies, thrown off from the human hand or articulate on human lips. Now God has spoken many words; for we read that 'God spake in divers manners unto the fathers by the prophets'; while He has spoken in ways more diverse still. Pillars of fire and cloud; dreams and visions of the night; trances and ecstasies of the day; thunders of the mount;

burning bushes of the desert—these were divine oracles in the days of old. But by the Word of God of our text is meant this written revelation of the divine will, these inspired and Holy Scriptures.

But the question naturally arises—and it is not a question to be suppressed or dismissed, but one that deserves and demands a reasonable answer—How may I know that these Scriptures are the word of God? Is the divine autograph upon them? and is there any divineness in them? Or is theirs a fictitious glory, a tinsel glitter, not yet worn off, wrapped about them by a superstitious and credulous age? And must we readjust our views, disrobing these Scriptures of their canonicals, and compelling them to wear a common, everyday dress? Some would do this. They would level down these Alpine summits, turning these Mountains of God, which touch the very heavens, into little sand-hills by the shore, a warren for the rabbits, or a links for the golfer's play. But he who studies these Scriptures; who looks into them—I do not say reverently, but sincerely and honestly—cannot but see the divinity which is in them, and a suffused glory about them—a glory which is not the afterglow of some setting sun, but a

splendour from the near heavens which abides.

Now we say, first, that from the very nature of things a divine revelation is both probable and necessary. Let us admit the existence of God, as Creator and Upholder of all things, a personal God, who knows, and rules, and loves: then let us turn to man, whose little life of mystery vanishes at either end in greater mysteries still; let us see him, endowed with reason, conscience, affection, will, having to sound his dim and perilous way down the stream of Time to an unknown sea; and in these two terms we have the known quantities of an equation whose unknown quantity will be a Revelation. For is it likely, is it conceivable, even, that God would endow His meaner creatures with unerring instinct, teaching the birds to build their nests, making them to know the seasons, guiding them in their migrations over trackless seas to lands they have not seen before, and that then He should leave His creature Man, created in His own image, endowed with higher faculties, with a soul which is immortal, without any clear directions, any revelations of His will and purpose, or any hints as to his destiny? I say that such a supposition is not only improbable, it is impossible.

Further; any revelation of God must be sub-

ject to human conditions; restricted and adapted to human capacities. It must speak to his mind, to his reason; and for this language is necessary. Thought itself cannot exist without speech; it must find in words its embodiment and expression. What the language of celestials may be we cannot say; but we know that when Heaven speaks to man it must be in an earthly tongue; and, whatever translations may be necessary, it must ultimately reach him in his native tongue, or at least through the language in which he thinks and speaks. Any revelation of God must thus come first to man, and then through man to the outside world. The human agent is indispensable; and in whatever ethereal ways the subtle sparks flash in out of the silences, the delicate coherers to receive the message and to interpret its meaning are the listening human ear and the reverent human heart.

But this introduction of the human element into the Word of God introduces an element of imperfection, leaving it open to slight inaccuracies and occasional discrepancies; for whatever theory of inspiration we may hold, we could not and we do not think that all these writers, revisers, compilers, and printers have for these centuries been supernaturally kept from fault and

error; especially when we remember that our earliest Scriptures were written without any vowel-points or any punctuation-marks. Write down an English sentence, using only the consonants of the words, and you see at once the difficulty—how it lends itself to various renderings. That there are these variant readings and slight discrepancies we do not deny; there may be even at times chronologies which are inaccurate and quotations which are incorrect; but these do not surprise me, much less shock me. They are simply inevitable whenever the human element comes in; and my wonder is, when I remember the imperfect channels of transmission, that these discrepancies are not more and greater. Heaven's sunlight traverses the vast spaces in straight lines; but let it reach our world's enveloping atmosphere, and it slants off at once in its refractions. But we do not question the light because it has allowed itself to be deflected from its straight course; nor do we refuse the sunshine, and the summer which it brings, because, forsooth, there are spots on the sun.

Time will not permit us to enlarge upon these evidences; and some we must omit altogether; as, for instance, the testimony of the Scriptures

themselves, as they claim, implicitly and emphatically, a divine origin and authority. But one mark of the divineness of this Word is *its remarkable unity*. The very name 'Bible' is a tacit recognition of this unity; for though it is really a collection of books—a library, in fact—yet modern thought always speaks of it as a unit, *the* Bible, *the* Book. And it is *the* Book, not only in its transcendent worth and surpassing interest, but in its wonderful harmony; for the harmony is perfect, however many and diverse are the separate chords. We must not forget that this Book has grown, as scientists tell us our material world has done, by processes of evolution. This light of Revelation was not always the full-rounded orb which makes bright our skies. Like the moon, it first appeared above earth's horizon a thin, pale crescent; and then it slowly rounded to the full—the patriarchal, the Mosaic, the prophetic, and the apostolic age marking its successive quarterings. Fifteen wide centuries come between these first pages and the last. The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew, and the New Testament in the Greek language; while embedded in the Hebrew are chapters written in Chaldaic. Its writers, many of them at least, are unknown, and

probably never will now be identified; while those we do recognize are taken from all the different walks of life, learned and unlearned, prophets, princes, artisans. Each wrote by himself, without collaboration, following, as he thought, his own impulses, as St. Luke with his Gospel; or following some divine call, as St. John with his Apocalypse. But not one writer knew, or even thought, that he was writing Scriptures which the ages should call 'Holy,' and which should be reverently placed in the sacred Canon. And yet how marvellously they agree! Differences of style there are, of course, prosaic, poetic, parabolic, proverbial; some lucid, some involved, for here the writer's own personality is impressed upon his work; and not only his personality, but his intention and aim. There are, too, great varieties of subject-matter, most of it original, but other parts compilations and revisions of older manuscripts; with here and there a lyric song thrown in, or an old-time legend. But with this ample, bewildering variety there is a remarkable unity, a unity surprising and divine; for, running through all these variations, you may detect the movement of one theme. The air may be softened down at times, until it is almost inaudible; now and then, for a few bars, it seems

lost in its loud accompaniments, or hidden in some brief interlude; but it re-asserts itself, striking out clear and sweet, in wonderful harmonies and unisons moving on to its close. And what is this theme? It is the theme of Redemption. This world of revealed truth, like our earth in its orbit, describes an ellipse; and its two *foci*, or centres, as we may call them, are Sin and Salvation. This whole Book is the history of the Fall and the great Redemption; and if you would make a survey of these Scriptures, measuring their distances and areas, and tracing out their mutual relations, you must get back to Paradise for your first base-line. You will find it in that bright promise how the Seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. This is the keynote which runs through histories, prophecies, Gospels, Epistles, and Apocalypse alike; for these Scriptures are but an enlarged 'Messiah.' And this 'Messiah' closes on its key-tone, ending where it began, in the paradise of God. But the Paradise of the Genesis is a Paradise Lost; while in the Apocalypse it is a Paradise Regained, where 'the woman's conquering Seed,' the Lamb upon the Throne, sees the travail of His soul in a redeemed and perfected humanity.

And so these Scriptures in their different parts form one unbroken whole. The Old Testament throws out and forward its projections and prophecies, into which the new structure is built; while together they form the nave and transept of a temple, vast, symmetrical, and beautiful. And as I pass within the Temple of Inspiration I am reminded of our own metropolitan church of St. Paul's, in London. Here in its Genesis you have its deep foundations; here in the Chronicles and Kings is the crypt where kings and warriors sleep; here in the Psalms is the chancel where the organ peals and the choristers sing; here in its aisles the voice of the prophet is heard, and Wisdom crieth aloud; here is the Whispering-gallery, where across the centuries the Prophecies and the Gospels answer to each other; while above all, on its highest dome, is the gilded cross. Nay, the whole temple is built on the pattern of the Cross; and enter it as we will, we shall see, if we are not still perverse and blind, standing before us, with a golden light upon it, the Altar of a supreme Sacrifice, the Altar of a great Atonement!

Still another evidence of its divineness is *the excellence of its doctrine*; but on this we must not linger. But what a code of morals is here!

How high is the standard of its ethics! How straight it rules the lines of duty—our duties to self, to family, to neighbour, to country, and to God! How sacredly it guards and how strongly it enforces justice, mercy, purity, and truth! It has benedictions and beatitudes without number for him who doeth well; but it has a Sinai of awful thunderings for the evil-doer, while its forked lightnings 'flash down on all things base, to strike them dead!' It does indeed speak of sin sometimes in language which makes us shiver; but if it uncovers the tortuous, slimy ways of sin it is only to show us its ghastliness and deformity, and to show how an unforgetting Nemesis overtakes it, and smites it with a terrible retribution. Yes, and these Scriptures do more than teach the moralities; they enjoin personal holiness, setting before us lofty ideals, with possibilities which are boundless; for the perfected saints of heaven, and the saints of earth not yet made perfect, all have found in this Word their strength and inspiration.

Another evidence of the divineness of these Scriptures is *the subtle, powerful influence they wield*. They have a rare restraining, refining, uplifting power; and let them touch and permeate a life, whether of the individual or the

nation, and they give to that life new aspects and new powers, with elevations of thought and purpose it never knew before. As the psalmist said, 'The entrance of Thy Word giveth light'; and after light come law, order, paradise. Go back to primal causes and you will find that we owe our liberties and our laws, the discoveries of science, the ameliorations of civilization, to the quickening and uplifting influences of this Word; and our late beloved Queen was right when, pointing the dusky emissaries of the South to this Book, she said that the foundation of England's greatness was England's Bible; for, as President Roosevelt has stated, 'No thoughtful man can doubt that to decrease the circulation and use of the Bible among the people would seriously menace the highest interests of civilized humanity.'

I have seen lands fair as our own, rich in natural resources, and enjoying an almost perpetual summer; but another faith was dominant, and their sacred oracle was the Koran. And what a change! It was another atmosphere entirely, stifling and oppressive. All thought was checked, all progress barred; and instead of hope, aspiration, and enterprise, there was the dullness of fatalism, or the blank abjectness of

despair. But the atmosphere of this Word is the breath of liberty, of fuller life. Quickening and inspiring, it gives the mind new powers, and the hands new strength and skill; and as it was Luther's translation of the Bible into German which created German literature, so it was Wyclif's and Tyndale's translations of the Bible into our own tongue which gave us Milton and Shakespeare, Browning and Tennyson. Nay, such is its refining, elevating power, that, in the romances of missions, there is one case, that of the Pitcairn Islanders, where a whole people—a mongrel, depraved, and sensual people—were lifted out of their barbarism and sensuality to the higher levels of a Christian faith and civilization through the silent influence of one copy of the Word of God, with no living teacher to expound it. Tell me, is there any other book, or any twenty other books, which could have accomplished this? No; this Word of God—for such it is and must be—stands alone; and when you bring together the highest productions of the human mind, like the sheaves of Joseph's dream, they stand off at a reverent distance, all making obeisance to this central sheaf, this inspired and inspiring Word.

Nor is it only the lowly and unlearned over

whom this Book wields such a magic spell; it holds and fascinates our profoundest thinkers, the mightiest intellects of earth. Said Sir William Jones, the eminent Orientalist, 'The Bible contains more true sublimity, more exquisite beauty, more pure morality, more important history, and finer strains of poetry and eloquence than can be collected from all other books, in whatever age or language they have been written.' Said Goethe, the German poet-philosopher, 'It is a belief in the Bible, the fruit of deep meditation, which has served me as the guide of my moral and literary life.' Said Ruskin, 'To my early knowledge of the Bible I owe the best part of my taste in literature, and the most precious, and on the whole, the most essential part of my education.' Gladstone loved to call it 'The impregnable Rock of Scripture.' It was his constant study, to which he looked for guidance and for strength; and he writes in his diary, 'On most occasions of very sharp pressure or trial some word of Scripture has come home to me, as if borne on angels' wings.' The Bible is one of the few books Stanley carries into the heart of Africa; the Bible is the daily solace of Sven Hedin as he explores the wilds and solitudes of Central Asia;

the Bible is the talisman the brave Gordon carries everywhere, to China or Khartoum; while to-day the greatest intellects of earth, its strongest, saintliest characters, pay their homage and reverence to this Book divine; and all hostile attacks upon it, no matter from what quarter they come, do but strengthen its defences, widening the sphere of its influence, and so demonstrating the divinity which is within it. God's moon rises round and bright, moving steadily through the skies; nor does it halt or turn aside for all the baying of the dogs. And this orb of revealed Truth, now rounded to the full, moves on its serene and majestic course, flooding the earth with glory, and lighting up the little lives of men; nor will it pause, or turn aside at the strenuous piping of a few 'Clarionettes.' For the Word of God is not bound, nor can its voice be drowned by any clamour or violence of men. It is the divine Truth, and the eternal years of God are hers; for though the grass withereth, and the generations of men swiftly come and go, 'the Word of the Lord abideth for ever.'

And what is the secret of its immortality, its deathless, ever-growing influence? It is because this Word responds to all the deeper needs and all the loftier aspirations of the human soul; for

somehow, as Coleridge says, this Book 'finds me.' It speaks to my conscience. Its clear light reveals and portrays me—that inner, real self of mine. It gives me the consciousness of sin; and at the same time it tells me of a wonderful Saviour and a wonderful salvation, unveiling possibilities of grace which are boundless. 'Search the Scriptures,' said Jesus, speaking of the Old Testament, 'for they testify of Me.' And they do. Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega of Scripture, the beginning and the end of this divine revelation. This written Word is but the vesture of the incarnate Word, a seamless robe woven in the heavenly looms, for the living Christ to wear, that our eyes may discern Him, and our hearts embrace Him; and stealing through this garment's hem, if the hand of faith will only touch it, is virtue enough flowing from the great Christ to heal all the sorrow and the woe of a sin-cursed world.

For warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is He;
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee.

The healing of His seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain;
We touch Him in life's throng and press,
And we are whole again.

Yes, but we must touch before we can feel; we must come that we may see; we must do that we may know; for only as we do His will can we know of His doctrine. A few days ago I stood upon the Cornish cliffs, and towering high overhead was Marconi's wireless telegraph station. I heard, on my earth-level, only the familiar, inarticulate voices of nature, the splash of the waves, the cry of a gull, the carol of a soaring lark; but up above me were voices I could not hear. The subtle sparks flashed in and out, carrying messages of business and of love from ships far out at sea, and from across the broad Atlantic. But those subtle sparks had flashed and called in vain had not the receiver been prepared and made syntonic, all sensitive and responsive to the call of the ether-waves. And we cannot read these messages of hope and love, we cannot discern the heavenliness or hear the music which is in them, until we bring a heart which is syntonic, a heart penitent, surrendered, and willing both to know and to do. But let Jesus touch this closed ear of ours, speaking His divine 'Ephphatha,' 'Be opened,' and then the silences will be vocal, and the word of God, which before was confused and almost inarticulate, will strike clear and sweet upon our listening

heart, filling our soul and life with music. For it will speak the Name high over all, the Name which charms our fears, even the Name of Jesus, the Christ of God; the Lamb once slain, and now eternally enthroned amid the glories He waits for us to share. Seek then to know Jesus, in the virtue of His redemptive sufferings, and in the power of His resurrection, and your difficulties and doubts will melt away and disappear like the mists of the morning; for 'to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent, this is life eternal.' May that life, abundant and eternal, be ours!

IV

LOOPS OF BLUE

IV

LOOPS OF BLUE

And thou shalt make loops of blue upon the edge of the one curtain from the selvedge in the coupling.—Exod. xxvi. 4.

SUCH are some of the minute directions given to Israel for the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness. Though but a movable structure, easily taken down and carried on the march; and though but a temporary one, to be superseded and laid aside when the temple should be completed, yet as representing God upon earth, it must be fashioned of the best and costliest material, and with the highest skill of workmanship. All the borrowed wisdom of the Egyptians, the skill of weaver, smith, and lapidary, must be laid under contribution; for the sanctuary of God must be beautiful as wealth and art and love can make it. In this chapter we have the specifications for the curtains, which shall form the tabernacle proper; their size, number, material, and colour

are all prescribed. They are to be of finest white linen, with cherubim embroidered in purple, blue, and scarlet; and each curtain must have at its edge fifty loops of blue, to be joined to the fifty golden taches, or hooks, of the next curtain; so that together they shall form one tabernacle, as the separate, convoluted petals form one perfect flower. The tabernacle was thus a divine thought, wrought out by human hands; and so complete was the pattern given that no detail was omitted. The same Mind that designed the ark and cherubim of gold, that had planned the Exodus, that had fashioned a paradise—the Mind whose creative thoughts the morning stars had sung together, now gives explicit directions about the fifty loops of blue that shall be worked into the selvedge of a curtain. In running our thoughts through these fifty loops, let us consider:

I. Little things in their relation to the Divine Mind.

II. Little things in their relation to our human life.

I. *Little things in their relation to the Divine Mind.* Man believes in size; with his superficial and cubic tables he measures things by area or by bulk. The magnitudes and

multitudes charm him, and the little things he can scarcely see. But God's thoughts are not as man's thoughts. All finite things are small to the Infinite, and our greatest worlds are nothing more than the dust of gold thrown off from His chariot-wheels. And so to the Divine Mind the great is small, and the small is great. He builds up nearly the whole fabric of our material world upon four simple elements. And see what infinite care He bestows upon even the smallest creatures, and with what infinite profusion He crowds them all about us! You let your eye rest upon some landscape; you admire its contour and its colouring, and you say, 'How beautiful!' Yes, but where is its beauty? what is it makes it? It is the little blade of grass the dewdrop bends, the tiny leaf that a breath sets fluttering, the patch of lichen that paints the wall, the moss that greens the stone—these are the little touches the Great Artist puts upon His canvas, making those exquisite pictures which no human art can copy. Put under your microscope the most delicate, the most finished product of human skill, and it is coarse, unsightly, without beauty or form; but put under that microscope any divine fabric, however small, and its perfect finish surprises you. And see the

important part these little creations play in the economy of nature. Here man is lord, walking the earth with an imperial step, and lifting his head to the stars. Yes; but man, at least the earthly part of him, is but dust, living upon the soil which the worms have made. The white cliffs of England are but the whitened tombs of a buried life—the shells of minute rhizopods of pre-historic times. The vast pyramids of Egypt are built up by the tiny nummulites, scores of which you might hold in the palm of your hand. You go out some warm and quiet spring day, and on every side you see the flash of insect wings; you hear their low hum and drone as they seem to flit aimlessly among the flowers. But it is no aimless, useless life they lead. They carry provender for the birds; they bear the subtle pollen from flower to flower. Their frail antennae are setting the flower-bells of the future ringing; while they make the present yield its fruitful harvests. Autumn's golden stores are thus carried on their wings; and only let the tiny insects disappear, and our birds would lose their song, our orchards would blossom but to mock us with their barrenness; nay, the whole economy of life might possibly be altered; the great wheel of Nature, so vast and so delicately

poised, thrown out of gear by the loss of an insect wing! And so it is not poetry only, but profound philosophy, as Mrs. Browning sings there is

> No lily muffled hum of a summer bee
> But finds some coupling with the spinning stars;
> No pebble at your feet but proves a sphere;

for earth and heaven call and answer to each other in ways we do not know; and the infinitely small becomes infinitely great, with the touch of God upon it and a purpose of God within it!

But if we have the Divine Mind wrought out in the works of Nature, we have it written out in this Word, this inspired Book of books. And it is the Book of books indeed; for no other volume has had such a genesis and history. Forty and six years was the temple in building, but Heaven spent fifteen centuries completing this Bible. No other volume treats of such momentous subjects or demands profounder study. History deals with minuter portions of time, and speaks of national growth, or national decay. This is a history of humanity. All time is compressed within these lids; nay, eternity itself is here. And yet what little pebbles are put in this mosaic pavement, across which the races and the ages march! When you come to dissect the story, what little, trivial things have found their way

into this inspired record! The plucking of an apple; the migrations of an Arabian sheik; a bundle of dreams and a coloured coat; a foundling child upon the river; a youthful widow gleaning among the barley; such are the little things that make up the narratives of the Bible. Did we say that these events were trivial, insignificant? Yes, in themselves, and by themselves. But nothing is by itself. It belongs to the whole, and the whole belongs to it. If not the curtain with the cherubim inwoven, it is one of those mysterious loops which, reaching out into the far future, clasps some of the golden taches there. What are a youth's dreams to us? Can we not dream plenty of our own? And why shake out the folds of this coloured coat? Ah, do you not see? That twin dream was the double star of destiny, lighting Israel down to Egypt; and the colours of Joseph's coat stretch out, curving and deepening to the very heavens, and spanning like the rainbow a nation's life. So in the ordering of God's providence do the wide doors hang on small hinges; and little things are great, with undreamed-of possibilities hiding within them.

II. And now we come to consider, *Little things in their relation to our human life.* We have

already glanced at this, for our life is the parchment on which divine purposes are written. But if we take a closer view we shall find that little things make up the texture of our life. Some few achieve greatness. Some wonderful discovery or invention ennobles them; or perhaps they have the fortune—or misfortune?—to live amid 'the fierce light that beats upon a throne.' Such, however, are the exceptions. To the great mass, humanity's rank and file, life is not a lofty eminence, to be seen afar, and to be scanned by admiring ages. No: it is rather a level plain, whose roads are dusty with the tramp of multitudes, and whose fields, instead of growing ambrosial food and nectar for the gods, grows such common things as wheat and barley and potatoes. When we are young there is a certain glamour, an aureole of poetry, about life, and we stay at Bethel dreaming our pleasant dreams. But the poetry soon settles down into soberer prose. With the dawn the bright ladder rolls up, the angels all vanish, and flinging our wallet across our shoulder, we tramp onwards to the future on a well-beaten and perhaps a rugged path, leaving our Bethels behind. We sometimes hope for chances to do great deeds, when we shall win our spurs, and be knights of some

heraldry or other. But, like the mirage, the vision keeps shifting back to that hinterland of our to-morrows, and it is not likely that we shall ever come up to it now. Indeed, we may almost take the past week as a sample of what our whole life will be. And what was that? There was a washing-day, a mending-day, a baking-day, a cleaning-day, and its Sunday, with one or two sermons, which will soon be forgotten. Or it will be the same monotonous task, running up whole columns of figures in the office, with now and then a brief holiday. These are the bells on which our life will ring its changes; and so the story will go on, with but little variation, until one day the train will glide away from the platform, and we are not in it; the merchants will crowd the flags as usual, but we are not among them; the children will come home for dinner, and other hands have prepared it, for we have gone into the great silence that awaits us all!

Such is life; its few, brief years, made up of a few ordinary, homely days. Yes, but out of these fugitive moments and uneventful days we may weave a life symmetrical and beautiful; on whose curtains the outside world may see, not the figures of the cherubim, but the image of the great Christ Himself. Aye, and within that life,

in its most inner and most sacred shrine, God Himself will dwell, not in the thick darkness longer, but in the eternal light.

But if little things make up the sum and substance of our life, we never know which of our 'trivial rounds and common tasks' is to be for ourselves, or for others, all-important. Suddenly we find some common-place event lifting itself up into prominence—reaching out in its influence and effects far and wide. What seemed but an ordinary thread, to be woven into the even texture of routine and monotony, becomes a loop of blue, sweeping far round into the future, or strangely interlacing with the lives of others. And generally it is some little thing which gives our life its elevations and new directions; for here Providence reverses human methods. It sets the imposing pyramid on its apex, it balances vast issues upon some delicate point; until the 'trivial round' becomes the pivotal centre, around which great movements turn, and waiting years revolve. It was only the swinging of a lamp in the cathedral of Pisa, but it lit up for Galileo the whole circle of the heavens. It was only the fall of an apple among the grass, but it opened for Newton the hidden secret of gravitation. It was a broken pane in

the window of his father's house set David Brewster searching after the mysteries of refracted light. A piece of lamp-black led Edison to the discovery of the electric light; and the chance prick of a pin on his finger led him to the invention of the phonograph. And so it is through all the sciences and all the histories; the great things turn upon the small, and little things are often but the hinges on which destiny turns. Some chance touch, or word, is the open sesame; and lo! a hidden door springs open, and man steps up into some new Eden, to see wonders and to gather fruits of knowledge he has not seen before. So our life is full of surprises; for we never can foretell its eventful days. The 'heavenly hours,' as Wordsworth calls them, we cannot predict, nor read them off from the calendar. They flash down upon us amid our common tasks; and all of a sudden the bush under which we sat for our noon-day meal is now afire; and though we knew it not, we find ourselves and our flocks within the encircling Mounts of God!

Again; *little sins are the great danger of life.* How is it that we make different degrees in sin?—that we pass them through the sieve of our judgement, and then classify them as sins of

the first magnitude or of the second or the third? I find in this Word songs of degrees, but I fail to find sins of degrees; at least I fail to find what the world calls 'little sins.' These Commandments of the Decalogue were written out at the same time, on the same tables, and by the same Hand; what right, then, have we to say that this is of vast moment, and another is but of trifling importance? Where are the little sins? Why, here in the garden; for it is nothing but the eating of a fruit God has forbidden. Is it not a little one? Little? Why it sunders heaven from earth, it drives man from the garden, and fills the world with woe.

> 'Twas but a little drop of sin,
> We saw this morning entering in,
> And lo, at eventide the world is drowned.

It is but the turning round of her eyes when God has bade her look not behind her, and she who last night had angels for her guests stands a stony monument upon the plain. It is but a moment of ill-advised speech, of unchecked pride; what is that to the years of sacrifice and devotion? Aye, but it locks the gates of the Jordan against Moses, and it digs the lonely grave 'on dark Bethpeor's hill.' It is the little sins which are our snare, our danger. Noah

safely outrides the deluge, to be overcome with wine; David, whose sling felled Goliath, is himself stricken down by a lustful look! Let us watch against the little sins, and the great ones will not harm us. The neglect of little duties first estranges the soul from God; and the little sins—the angry word, the uncharitable thought—these are the moths that fret the garment, the little foxes that spoil the vines.

Lastly: *Little things are the test of faithfulness.* It is said of Turner, the great painter, that he has been known to spend a whole day sitting upon a rock and throwing pebbles into a lake. And when at evening his companions rallied him upon having done nothing, he answered them, 'I have done this at least; I have learned how a lake looks when pebbles are thrown into it.' And it was this, his faithfulness in detail, that made him great. We are apt to spend effort upon the great works of life; to elaborate them, and then to overlook or scamp the lesser duties, the lowlier, out-of-sight work. But the mark of faithfulness in work is in doing the small, out-of-sight things as well as we do the more imposing ones. We should give to everything our best. And we may take it that our service will lie mainly among the little things. Jesus never

asked any one to do a great thing for Him. He did look for a great faith; He did ask for a great, all-mastering love; but when it came to service, it was the little ministries He so delighted in; the care for His little ones, the cup of water for His tired ones, the little deeds of kindness for His sorrowing, suffering ones. And when Peter dreamed of great achievements, with flashing sword becoming a sort of knight-champion, Jesus bade him lay his sword aside, and by the beach-fire He set him his life-work among the littles, as He said, 'Feed My lambs!' So it is with us. It is not the large gift, the noble sacrifice, that makes up our Christian service; it is rather in the little things: the little acts of kindness and of love, the hourly forgetfulness of self and thoughtfulness for others, the daily suppressing and crushing out of selfishness, hasty tempers, and unloving thoughts. These are the fields of our service and of our victories. Be not, then, greedy of heroism. Call back the restless will 'that hurries to and fro'

> Seeking for some great thing to do,
> Or secret thing to know.

Be content with a little space and with a work of lowly love; even if it be out of sight, or among

His little ones; for there is no 'little one' of Christ's but throws his shadow up to the highest heaven. Make the lowly task high with your lofty thoughts and aims, and give to it your highest and best. So will you build up in your life another Tabernacle of Witness; a tabernacle of God, fragrant with sweet spices, and vocal with sweet psalms.

V

COMMANDING HIS HOUSEHOLD

V

COMMANDING HIS HOUSEHOLD

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement.—GEN. xviii. 19.

IT has been a high day at Mamre, for Abraham has been entertaining angels unawares, and the Lord of angels Himself has been his guest. Now he sets them on their way, and as they part we read, 'And the two men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom, but Abraham stood yet before the Lord.' In the verse of our text, and following verses, we have a divine soliloquy; we hear what God's thoughts are concerning Abraham. And so our text falls naturally into two divisions, as it shows us:

I. A human character as registered in heaven.

II. A human character as influencing earth.

I. *The character as registered in heaven.* Here is a man whom Heaven delights to honour; so much thought of that he must needs be taken

into the divine counsels, as if he were a partner in this business, or at least an auditor, to look over the books of providence. Why must Abraham be told what the divine plans are about these cities of the Plain? And why should these three celestials go so far out of the way to tell him? And why does God make over to him the whole land of Canaan, giving him visions by day and wonderful promises under the starlight? There must have been some special qualifications about the man, something fitting and deserving; for Heaven's favours do not fall randomly to earth, for any vagrant feet to come up to them, and any idle hand to gather them. Heaven's front seats are always reserved, and he who passes into that select circle must pay the price, and duly qualify; and the price of these promotions is approved character and proved ability. And so we find the answer to our questions here. Abraham had shown himself worthy of these special honours. He had been weighed in the balances of Heaven, and not been found wanting. Tested and proved, he was now approved—his faithfulness, his ability, his high-toned moral life winning first the recognition and then the recond of Heaven.

There is a singular beauty and a certain

majesty about the character of Abraham. His life looms up on that far horizon of the past like a colossal pyramid; and like the pyramid, too, it stands foursquare with earth, while all its sides slope towards the heavens. Once or twice there is a faltering of his faith, and he who at other times walks so erect and straight stoops to a questionable subterfuge, seeking a low subway out of his difficulties. But these lapses—which Heaven took care should go on the record—are brief and few; and with these exceptions his character is without a flaw. Abraham walked with God, farther than Enoch; and he left, as Enoch did not, his 'footprints on the sands of time,' that we might see them and take heart again. How close and constant was his correspondence with Heaven! Chaldea, Canaan, Egypt—it was all the same to him; for, setting his heart listening, the silences began to speak, as messages flashed in upon him from the great Unseen. And these divine voices he implicitly believed, and promptly obeyed. Does the Voice tell him that his offspring shall be as the stars—innumerable? He wonders, as well as he may, but he does not doubt; and in his lengthened name he carries a record of the wonderful promise and the music of a great hope. Does the

Voice bid him break from the familiar past, and leave kindred and country for lands he has never seen? He does not question the Voice, nor does he hesitate; he goes, moving on and on towards the far horizon of the west, until the Voice which bade him go now bids him pitch his tent for the long halt. And then we see him buying a grave within his land of promise, so throwing out his anchor of stone heavenward and Canaanward, as if he said, 'Here is our home, and here we rest.' Does the Voice tell him—or does he think it does—that his child must die, aye, with his own hand, too? He obeys the Voice, though he knows well that God cannot slay this child of His own promise.

So completely did Abraham surrender himself to the will of God, not with any grudging, but with a glad, surrender. His life swung round to that Higher Will easily and swiftly, as the ship answers to her helm; no matter whether it meant for him some Black or some Pacific sea, one stormy and tempestuous, or one calm and bright with its perpetual summer.

But if Abraham is careful to keep on good terms with Heaven, taking his directions and orders from thence, he keeps on friendly, if not intimate, terms with earth, fulfilling his earthly

duties, and keeping his earthly relations well adjusted. Coleridge said, 'We need celestial observations whenever we attempt to mark terrestrial charts.' But some are so intent upon celestial observations, losing themselves in dreams and reveries, that they forget to mark their terrestrial chart, and become visionary, unpractical, inefficient and useless in worldly, temporal affairs. But Abraham's 'other-worldliness,' as it is facetiously called, did not blind him to these earthly interests of life—interests which, if subordinate to the higher things, are still necessary. And so Abraham sought to make the best of both worlds; and he succeeded. Wealth, power, fame came to him in a sort of natural way; Fortune, no longer capricious, but constant and faithful, laying at his feet her ample possessions and affluent riches. Yet there was nothing grasping or selfish in his conduct of affairs; nothing tricky or shady, as in the life of Jacob. Instead of this there was a marked unselfishness, as we see in his generous offer to his nephew. When their herdmen quarrel, and they must separate, he asks Lot to take the first choice. He has age on his side, but he waives this; he has power on his side, but he does not use it. 'You choose first,' he says, 'east or west, to the right

or to the left, it makes no difference to me; I will take just what you leave.' That offer, so unselfish, so unworldly, so contrary to the usual ways of men, stamps the man at once. Abraham had learned to curb and hold in his desires; he had imposed upon himself a self-denying ordinance. Lot and his descendants—and they are very many—keep a keen eye upon Number One; round that central, imposing unit they would have all other figures to dance. But Abraham puts Number One in the second or third place. Live and let live, is his motto; and when the confederate kings sweep down upon Lot's ranch and carry off his possessions, it is Abraham the unselfish, but not the unready, who marshals his troops and recovers the lost spoil. And when a graver danger threatens, and Heaven is about to hurl upon the guilty cities its terrible rain of fire, it is Abraham now who steps in to intercede —with his 'Peradventure, peradventure,' driving back the advancing lines of flame, until his last plea is exhausted, and the burning cloud sweeps by him to fall upon Sodom, one avalanche of fire.

Such is the man of commanding intellect and lofty soul, whom Heaven treats with such respect and deference. 'I know him,' says God; 'he is My servant, tried and true. He will not betray

Me; he will not disappoint Me. I will confide My purpose to him, as I make of him a great nation; and through him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' And it was so. The wonderful promise made to the childless man under the Syrian starlight the histories have confirmed and demonstrated; for the two great peoples, which for the centuries have lived side by side, but have never coalesced—the Hebrews and the Arabs, worshippers of Jehovah and worshippers of Allah—both these trace their lineage back to the same source, proud to call Abraham their father; while in a spiritual sense all true believers are the children of Abraham, who was 'the father of the faithful and the friend of God.'

So it seems that these little lives of ours are not so little and unimportant as we think. We project the shadows of ourselves out upon the world, and we throw them upward into heaven itself. We think we play our part on a very narrow stage, and to a scanty audience, sometimes to no audience at all—there is simply the monologue of our own thoughts, of good or ill. But it is not so. We are all the time playing in the open, before an invisible audience, which is silent indeed, but intensely critical; by whom our acts

are weighed, and our words, the very lightest of them, remembered. Indeed, we speak no word, even in a whisper, but it strikes upon the deep skies overhead, and the skies send it on reverberating over into the eternities. True it is, God knows us, every one of us—knows us as others cannot know us, and as we cannot know ourselves. We are all the time making new records, and Heaven keeps them safe; as we shall know some day when the books are opened. What others may think of us may not matter much; but it does matter what Heaven thinks of us, what these unerring registers say of us. Perhaps none of us would like to hear the record now, just as it stands; at least, not before our sins and failures have been forgiven and forgotten. But they may be, for

> There is plentiful redemption
> In the blood that has been shed;
> For the love of God is broader
> Than the measures of man's mind,
> And the heart of the Eternal
> Is most wonderfully kind.

II. *A human character as influencing earth.* 'That he will command his children and his household after him.' It may seem strange to us how Abraham could do this, for there were

few tools in those days for fashioning character, or chiselling out of the rude stone or clay some winged angel. No sanctuary invited them to worship; no word of the Holy Book was yet penned; there were only the silent Sabbath and the unwritten law in their heart. Though it is just possible there might be something more; for there were other revelations of God which are not included in this Word. Listen to this psalm:

> O, my God, Thou givest not rest to Thy servant.
> In the waters of the surging flood take his hand:
> Let the wind carry away the transgressions I have committed;
> Destroy my manifold wickednesses like a garment.
> O, my God, seven times seven are my transgressions,
> My transgressions are ever before me.

That penitential psalm was composed and sung in that East country before Abraham left it for the land of Promise; and it is not impossible that Abraham himself had used it in the services of his house-church. At any rate we know that he used to attach his home to Heaven in very real, visible ways, establishing wherever he went a domestic shrine. As the Romans in their migrations carried with them their Penates, consecrating their home to some divinity, so this disciple of a higher cult in all his wanderings was careful to take God with him; and wherever he pitched

his tent he would set over against it an altar of the Lord. It is just as if he wanted the eye of Heaven to look in at his open door; as if he could not live without God; as if home would not be home without the great All Father; and as if earth to him would be but lonely and barren were not the touch of Heaven constantly upon it. And this, I apprehend, was Abraham's commanding way of influencing his household. It was not that he used any driving methods, for though bodies may be driven, souls cannot, even to what is good. It was rather the commanding influence of his own character and example. Their smaller lives were caught up in the sweep of his own enthusiasm and faith, as our earth first binds the moon to herself, and then takes it with her round the sun.

This Abrahamic spirit is what the Church and the world sorely need to-day; for of all the influences which touch the opening life of childhood none is so great or so lasting as the influence of home. The home, as Beaconsfield said, 'is the unit of civilization.' It is the factory where habits are made and characters are formed; where the weighted bias is embedded in the young life, giving its directions across the years, to the right, or to the wrong. It is said

that Alpine rivers will carry with them, depositing here and there far over the plain, the seeds of flowers which grew in their upland solitudes. Such certainly is the fact with those other streams whose currents are living blood; and many a life has flowed on to enrich the lower lands, ever blessing and ever blessed, which brought down its flower-seeds and its netted sunbeams from the quiet and perhaps the humble home on the moorside or the fell. And we shall find that, as a rule, our children's lives will look and flow in the direction to which our homes front. They learn to kneel at those altars where we offer sacrifice, whether it be the shrine of Pleasure, or Mammon, or Jehovah Himself. And it is possible to create such a religious atmosphere in the home, so to bring example, precept, prayer to bear on the lives of our children, that almost unconsciously, and with no marked transitions, they shall develop a true, robust, spiritual life. If you notice the trees along the shore, you will see that they nearly all bend to the east or to the north-east. It is the homage they pay to the prevalent winds. Successive passing forces, each short-lived in itself, have left their bent in the very heart of the tree. And we may so throw across our homes the subtle influence of our life,

we may so make felt the breath of earnest prayer, that all the up-growing lives within shall bend toward Heaven with an almost natural love for the right and the pure and the true.

But it is to be feared that home piety is not quite the pervasive and the persuasive influence that it was half a century ago, and that there is not quite so much altar-building as in our fathers' times. It is true that times have altered. Competition is more keen; trains, trams, telegraphs, and telephones put a strain and pressure on our life which our fathers did not know. But this only makes the need the greater. We do want some little space reserved from that clamorous world which, as Wordsworth says, 'is too much with us.' We must bank out the encroaching tides which threaten to submerge and drown us; and no dyke is so effectual in keeping back the inrush of the waters as the family altar. When Obed Edom took into his house the ark of God, sheltering it for three months, we read, 'The Lord blessed Obed Edom and all his household.' Yes, and He blesses the Obed Edoms of to-day; and over those homes where the altar is reared and the ark of God abides, Heaven spreads its canopy of light and peace, and unseen angels pass freely in and out. In a modest house

on the Lancashire moors lived a Christian family which, besides a little land, had some handlooms for weaving. Once a week the eldest boy would go off to Manchester with the week's cloth; and as they gathered round the family altar that morning, among other prayers of the father was always this, 'O Lord, bless James, and may he fall into good hands to-day.' So was the youth sent out to business, armed with his father's and his mother's prayers. And he did fall into good hands, for the Lord greatly prospered him, giving him wealth, honour, and troops of friends. That youth was James Barlow, a man honoured and beloved, who served both worlds so well, and who left behind him, as one of his many memorials, the Children's Home on the Edgworth moors.

So does the family altar throw its shadow of light across all lands and seas of earth, and forward down the years, and upward to the highest heavens. Let us see that our home, wherever in God's wide world it may be, shall front the heavens, with a clear outlook on the skies. Let the fragrance of a cheerful piety pervade its atmosphere, hallowing alike its tasks, its conversations, its amusements; let the Word of God have its due place and honour; let the cloud of

grateful incense rise daily from its hearth; and such a home will grow, as in their native air, God's saints and prophets. And as by the tent of Mamre, heaven's angels will linger by its door, and the Lord Himself will come, not, either, as a passing guest, but to abide for all the days and all the years, until in the Father's House of many mansions we find our true, our eternal home, to 'dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

VI

HIS MOTHER AND MINE

VI

HIS MOTHER AND MINE

And his mother and mine.—Rom. xvi. 18.

IN the starry firmament there are worlds which are themselves invisible, but whose presence is detected by their subtle influence over other worlds, causing what astronomers call 'perturbations' in their movements. It was the 'perturbations' of the planet Uranus which first led our astronomers to imagine there was some unknown world lying back in the void spaces which was the cause of these irregularities; and working from these irregularities, by a series of abstruse mathematical calculations, our astronomers had located this new planet Neptune, where some months afterwards the more powerful telescope made it visible. So in this firmament of Scripture, while some constellations stand out clear and bright, as they circle around their central Sun and ours, in other points of the heavens we have patches of gold, which form a sort of Milky Way, 'a meeting of gentle lights

without a name'; while here and there are brightly-shining worlds, which, all nameless and invisible, move on in their true and silent courses, and whose presence we can only detect by the subtle influence they exert upon others. Of such is the anonymous character of our text, this elect lady whom the great apostle now salutes with such deference and devotion. He does not name her—there was no need to do that—but he speaks of her with a filial reverence, and bending the literal truth somewhat to make his metaphor, he calls her by that sacred name of 'mother.'

And here she stays, shining serenely in this star-lighted firmament, as the mother of Rufus, and the step-mother, or mother-in-love, of Paul himself. Shall we turn the glasses of our search toward this new star? I think it will well repay us to do so; and if we may not discover her name, or look upon her face, we may trace out the orbit in which she moves, while this spectroscope of Scripture will resolve for us some of her 'gentle lights' into ribbons of violet and of gold.

But to find her first we must go, not to Rome, where she now resides, nor to Corinth, where the Apostle writes his letter, but far away across the Mediterranean. History tells us that Ptolemaus Lagi had deported 100,000 Jews from their native

land, and had settled them in Northern Africa, on the coasts of Libya and Cyrene; and in 300 years these exiles had so multiplied that special synagogues were provided for them in Jerusalem, as they returned for their annual feasts. And so we read (Acts ii. 10), in that Pentecost enumeration of the lands of their dispersion, of Egypt, of 'strangers of Rome,' and 'the parts of Libya about Cyrene'; while in chapter vi. 9 we read of the 'synagogue of the Libertines and Cyreneans,' which raised the disputation and clamour against Stephen, which ultimately led to his martyrdom. We cannot say certainly that our nameless lady came from these southern lands; but we can say that such a conjecture is a possible, and indeed a probable one; for her husband at any rate was a Cyrenean. But leaving their birth-land of Africa—for even in those days migrations were frequent, and voyages long—the Cyrenean Jew and his wife find a home in their Holy Land; not, however, in Jerusalem, but at some place within easy distance from it.

And now for the first time this estimable family come into the clear light, father and mother, and their two boys, who are now young men. Let us go to Jerusalem to-day. It is the dark day of

the crucifying. Last evening in the borrowed guest-chamber the twelve kept their sad Passover. Last night the Garden of Gethsemane witnessed the supreme agony; when turning heavenward His face, down which the blood-sweat ran, the Saviour prayed, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.' Now the mock judgement is over, and the strange procession is moving out to Calvary. First come the soldiers clearing the way; and then the condemned Jesus, bearing on His shoulder His own heavy cross. But He is worn and weary, all faint with His long, sleepless night of agony, and as they issue from the gate of the city, He falters and staggers beneath His burden. Just at that instant a man is seen approaching with staff in hand, and passing into the city. Evidently he is known as a friend of Jesus, for out of scores of others who would be passing by, they purposely single him out, drag him into the line of the procession, and then force him to bear the cross, under which Jesus has fallen, half-swooning, to the ground. If you will turn to the story of the Evangelists (Matt. xxvii. 32; Mark xv. 21; and Luke xxiii. 26), you will see that the stranger was unwilling to take any part in their dark tragedy and crime. How could he assist in the crucifying of his Lord?

And he stoutly refuses to do it, until by main force they oblige him; for we read they laid hold upon him 'and compelled him to bear the cross'; St. Luke speaking of the 'violent hands,' while Matthew and Mark speak of the 'compelling.' And so the procession, which had come to a halt, is now re-formed for the last short march, for Calvary is not very far from the gate.

And now we see Jesus, not led as before, but borne, in His exhaustion half-carried along by the soldiers; while close behind Him is the stranger, forced to do a service at which his heart shudders and bleeds, carrying the cross of his Lord. Ah, now you recognize the stranger. It is Simon the Cyrenean, the husband of the elect lady, of whom we are in search. We are told that he was coming in 'from the country'; and this would imply—for it was still early morning—that his home was in the country, and not so far away, but that he could reach the city by nine o'clock in the morning. That home of Simon we cannot locate with certainty; but as he would be approaching the northern, or Damascus gate, we should look for his home somewhere to the north or north-west of the city. But wherever we may find it I think we are quite safe in saying that it was a home whose sympathies, and,

perhaps, hospitalities, had been given to Jesus; and maybe—for it is more than likely—it was one of His quiet havens, like another home at Bethany, whose guest-chamber was always ready for the dear Master. This we do know as an absolute certainty, that in the Cyrenean home, now beneath these Judean skies, our elect lady is the presiding genius and home-queen; and how she would keep her home, though we have no solitary word of direct testimony, yet we may know well when we fling the light of the apostle's salutation upon it: 'his mother and mine.' It lights up her personality, focusing, as it were, her very features upon the page, letting us see the radiance of her face; those eyes so full of meaning, always reading the wants of others, with the flash-lights of love playing ever about them. It lets us see a heart full of generous sympathy, and a hand ever open in its charities and gifts, ever true in the friendliness of its grasp, and ever alert and skilful in its ministries. We need no other testimonial than Paul's devoted expression to be sure that in her we have a character of rare beauty and refinement, and one whose quiet modesty did not care that her name should be spoken aloud, not even in Scripture. For this, I apprehend, is the reason why he

delicately conceals her name, wrapping the veil of anonymity about her, as he puts a world of meaning into one word, my 'mother.'

And Simon the Cyrenean is the fortunate, happy one, with this gentle ministering angel ever at his side, the companion of his long travels, the sharer of his hopes and fears, the mother and trainer of his boys, the keeper and maker of his home. And I can imagine it might have been the wife's suggestion that sent Simon so early to Jerusalem. They would have heard all about the triumph; they would have seen the dark and ominous clouds gathering in the horizon; they would have seen the flashes of its lightnings, and heard its distant thunder, the sinister looks of the temple authorities; and it may be that the wife had said, 'Simon, I wish you would go into the city, and see how it fares with Jesus. I feel sure that some trouble is going to happen. Go and greet the Master, and invite Him to come and stay with us awhile; it will be safer here.' But at any rate we do know this: that it was she who ministered to this minister of Jesus. She had prepared for him the morning meal, given him his instructions, and now was eagerly waiting for his return. And when he did return, and had told his story—how they

forced him to carry the cross, and be a witness of the sad scene of Calvary—there would be weeping in that Cyrenean home; the mother's heart would be struck with keen anguish; but she would try to speak one comforting word to her husband, who was reproaching himself with bitter reproaches, saying, 'Well, Simon, you must not grieve at the part you did. But just think that you lightened the load of the Master; and though the way He had to walk—the way to Calvary—was steep and awfully rugged, you did a little to make the way more easy, as you took the load from His shoulders to put upon your own.'

We do not know much about the Cyrenean and his wife after that dark day of the cross, but there is another incident I like to link with this same home. St. Mark, who tells us that Simon 'was coming out of the country,' uses the same expression afterwards, telling us (xvi. 12), 'And after that He appeared in another form unto two of them as they walked and *went into the country*.' Now I think St. Mark meant something by this; and that the similarity, or rather identity, of expression, indicates that the two roads were the same road, and that Cleopas and his companion on their way to Emmaus are

following in reverse ways the path of the Cyrenean; and that the home of Simon and his devoted wife was no other than the Emmaus house, where, in the dusk of the evening, Cleopas and his companion constrain Jesus to abide with them, and where He made Himself known to them in breaking of bread. We do know that Jesus appeared to those in whom He felt a special interest—to Peter, to the Magdalene, and to the Eleven—and is it not likely He would wish to see the disciple who bore the cross for Him? Does it not seem as if Jesus must have had some further purpose than simply conversing with these two men, who did not belong to the inner circle of the disciples? That the Emmaus home was a familiar spot, the home of a friend, the narrative certainly indicates; and in its direction and its distance from the city it agrees perfectly with the direction and distance of Simon's house. If this be so, what fresh light it throws upon the narrative! What a local and personal colouring it puts into the picture! To think that Simon and his wife prepared the evening meal for their three unexpected guests; and that Jesus made Himself known to them before He mysteriously vanished from their sight, to reappear in the upper room at Jerusalem!

But if in our search for the nameless one our path so far has lain along the line of the probabilities, we now come to something definite and certain. That Paul should send to her his special greeting in his letter to the Romans shows that he knew her well; that some time and somewhere their paths had crossed; while the singular and sacred designation he gives to her, calling her 'mother,' is clear proof that she has shown him no little kindness, tender and loving attentions, which he can never forget. Where it was that their paths crossed, or where, rather, for a little while they ran in parallel lines, we cannot say. But might it not have been during one or other of his visits to Jerusalem? For the Apostle visited the Holy City at least five times; and though on one of these occasions he was the guest of Peter (Gal. i. 18), and on another the guest of Mnason (Acts xxi. 16), it is quite possible that in one of these visits he was the welcome guest of the Cyrenean home. Indeed, it is not unlikely that the acquaintance, which afterwards ripened into a close friendship, was begun in the house of Peter; for it is St. Mark, the intimate friend of that Apostle, who speaks so particularly of the Cyrenean family (xv. 21), and who introduces

to our notice the Rufus to whom Paul now sends his tender salutation, claiming him as a sort of step-brother. Paul wraps up in the appellation 'mother' a wealth of precious and fragrant memories, a loving service which we may not know, but which he recalls after the lapse of long years gratefully and reverently.

We cannot trace the nameless one much further; but it would seem that afterwards the family left their Judean home to reside in Rome, where Paul's loving message reaches her. It is, however, a broken circle now; for the omission of Simon's name would indicate that the cross-bearer had followed his risen Lord to heaven. But the aged widow still survives—one of the band of immortals whom the aged Paul now names, and whom 'the churches of Christ salute,' as they will salute them down all the coming years.

Such is the orbit, so far as we can trace it, of this nameless Star, which, itself hidden in a luminous cloud, throws a summer warmth and brightness into the lives of others. And when the Temple of Inspiration was reared, one honoured niche was reserved by its Divine Builder for the elect lady who, for long years, had been the helpmeet and companion of the

Cyrenean cross-bearer, who had borne and trained her two sons, Alexander and Rufus, to be disciples and ministers of Christ, and who had so tenderly ministered to the homeless apostle that he could not speak of her in the common accents of our human speech, but only by that word which is so full of all deep meanings, the sacred name of 'Mother.'

VII

THE SINGERS OF THE TEMPLE

VII

THE SINGERS OF THE TEMPLE

For the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem.—NEH. xii. 29.

THE Book of Nehemiah opens upon a dark page of Jewish history. Hostile armies have swept over the borders, laying waste the land of plenty, and leaving Jerusalem a desolation. Its walls are broken down, its gates burned with fire, its temple destroyed, and the sweet songs of Zion are hushed in a sad and awful silence. But God, who hears the sighs of the contrite and marks the tears of the penitent, has had mercy upon her. Nehemiah returns to the city of his fathers, and rebuilds, under great difficulties, the walls of Jerusalem; and to-day is the joyful dedication of the wall. Calling in the singers, who had made themselves villages round the city—as if they wanted to be near, and all ready to strike up once more their grand choruses, soon as the painful interlude of silence should end —they marched in processional order and in

festive attire upon the wall, with psalteries, harps, and cymbals. So do the Jews keep their dedication with gladness and with singing, wrapping about their Holy City, which now lifts up her head above the ashes of her desolation, their garlands and wreaths of song. But leaving these singers to chant their *Jubilates* over a restored city-wall, I invite your attention to the wider subject: The Consecration of Music to Religion.

And first we will turn to Nature, to see *how music is related to the divine mind and purpose.* That there is something divine in music even the heathen recognized; for our word 'music' is derived from the Muses of Grecian mythology, the nine daughters of the great Jove, who presided over the realms of poetry and art. The old Greeks looked in the right direction, but they did not look high enough; for he who would find the fontal origin of music, the beginning of all harmonies, must climb higher than the hills of Greece, up to the eternal Hills of God; for the River of Song, like the River of Life, flows from underneath the throne. The laws of harmony, which are universal and eternal, have not been made by human science. Science has indeed discovered them, as it discovered the law of gravitation; but the harmonies were all there,

with the laws that govern them, before Jubal caught some of them, and hid them in his primitive organ; aye, before the first human voice struck upon the silences of Eden. All sound is produced by vibrations of the atmosphere, the tones rising or falling as the vibrations are more or less frequent. To produce one note there must be 35,000 of these air-vibrations in a second, breaking on our ear very much as the sea-waves break upon the shore. It is true that this is an exceptional note, for it is the highest note possible. The human ear has but limited powers of hearing, both in its upward and its downward range, and beyond these limits are the outlying realms of perpetual silence. Not that sound itself has exhausted its powers, and given us a complete list of its variations; but simply because our ear has reached its utmost capacity of receiving. Perhaps to ears more finely strung than ours there are heights and depths of melody we know not of—*Glorias* dropping from the sky, which are far above the poor Excelsior of our highest reach. But even within our range what countless combinations and possibilities there are! What infinite variations can be struck from the seven octaves of our ordinary keyboard! —variations which can express, in ways innumer-

able, all the moods and feelings the heart of man can know. And then to think that this vast world of harmony, of whose treasures the musicians of the past and present have given us but a few fragments, is built upon the seven primary tones! Why, the very thought is bewildering; and, dazed and staggered by the immensities, our mind is thrown back upon the infinite. Yes, it was God Himself, and not the Muses, gave us our music; and all these endless combinations of oratorio, hymn, and song which now delight the soul of man must first have been in the mind of God; for the laws of harmony are but the divine volitions, expressions of His purpose and His power. The music must have been there before it could have been here; and Nature herself could have given us no solitary note had not the hand of the great Creator first hidden these harmonies within her heart.

It is not an impossible conception that God might have fashioned our earth, as He has made our moon, without an atmosphere, and by some readjustment of the vital organs have fitted man for his altered world. But what a world it would have been! Nature would have uttered no sound; there would be neither song of bird nor voice of men. The deep silence of the grave

would be about us. Silent as the shadows we should go our different ways, looking vacantly into each other's faces, and seeking, all in vain, for an answering thought. Nay, there would be no thought to answer; for without language, without the sound of speech, the mind itself would lose its powers, and our silent, soundless world would swing sadly round its silent skies, carrying in its asylum a race of imbeciles or maniacs. But it was not so to be; for when the creative hand of God set our earth in the firmament, as the morning stars sang around it, the Voice that said 'Let there be light,' said also, 'Let there be sound! Let there be music on My earth.' And it was so. He who laid down His law of gravitation, giving the world its place and its step in those vaster precessionals of the skies, laid down too His laws of harmony, at the same time filling the world's heart with music. And have you ever stopped to think how full the world's heart is of music? Nature is ever throwing off her songs; now some sweet solo, with fugues and trills, some throstle-song in the garden, some lark-song in the sky, and now it is some Hallelujah Chorus, or the deeper diapasons of the storm.

Is it only a chance coincidence, too, that the

Law of the Octaves seems to run through all visible and temporal things? that as all harmony is built up on the seven foundation-tones, so these visual harmonies we call Beauty are all built up on the seven primary colours; while time itself is given in measured beats, our Sabbaths completing the octave? Does it not indicate that the visible and audible are closely related? —that possibly the laws of harmony which rule in the world of sound may also rule in the realm of silence? There may be a visible as well as audible music; for what is the beauty that Nature shows, that beauty of form and colour which no Art can copy, but a visible music, bringing to our eye the same sweet harmonies that aural music brings to our ear? Indeed, if you place loose sand on a vibrating material, and then play to it, the sand will in a sense dance to the music, arranging itself in regular lines of beauty, responding to the several tones you struck; so that one skilled in reading them will read off from the changing sand-figures the notes of the chromatic scale you played. And all Nature's voices are musical, as all her movements are rhythmical. I was walking along the shore the other day, and I was struck with the tone of the various sounds which reached my

ear: the clear tenor of the church bell; the swash of the breaking waves; the shrill treble call of the gull down at the water's edge; the deeper baritone of the rook over the sandhills; the measured thud of a steamer, passing down the Channel; the silvery laugh of the children at their play; while all around me, in the sand-ripples, I saw the score of the music the ebbing tide had played. I was listening to Nature's 'one clear harp, in diverse tones,' for each tone was a true note of the musical scale. Nature never utters a discord; and if you give her one she will not repeat it; for before she sends back her echo she will lay her finger upon the false note and correct it, sending back a perfect harmony. Carlyle did but speak a great truth when he said, 'See deep enough, and you see musically; the heart of Nature being everywhere music, if you can only reach it.' Yes, *if* you can only reach it; but it takes a quiet, listening ear to do that. Ruskin can detect a peculiar tone in the Scottish streams, altogether different from that of the streams which come tumbling from our Welsh or our Cumberland hills, and he speaks of 'the beauty of the sound of Scottish streams.' And so you can touch nothing of Nature's but there are harmonies slumbering within it; or itself is

a stray note of some grander song. It may be only dead wood from the forest, dead ore from the mine, dead tusks of the beast; but put breath into them, and a living soul before them, and you have songs and anthems without number, and the organ's 'Grand Amen.' So does Nature sing her vocal or her silent psalms, with never-ceasing Hallelujahs. It is one perennial *Te Deum*, on through all the seasons and through all the years, 'All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father Everlasting!'

And now we come to see *the place of Music in Worship*. It is only what we should expect that Religion would early incorporate music and song with her worship; and we have no sooner left the forfeited Paradise behind than we find Jubal, with his harp and organ, giving the world its first lessons in harmony; while in later years Religion laid her hand upon all instruments of music, pressing them into her service. And see how God Himself provides for this! We place our chancel at the farther end of the church; and it is fitting it should be there, close by the altar, in the shadow of that Cross which gave us all our songs. But as I enter the Temple of Inspiration I find its chancel in the centre, the nave. Here in the Hebrew Psalter are the songs God Him-

self gave His people to sing, and which He has willed shall never die. And what a collection it is! How they seem to drop off their Hebraisms, becoming as it were a universal language! How strangely they fit in with all times and all moods of man! One proof of their inspiration is their immortality. We cannot sing the heart out of them, nor do we weary of them; they are just as fresh and inspiring to-day as when their jubilant notes first struck out upon that clear Judean air. And they are jubilant notes in the main. Now and then you have a minor chord, some *Miserere* wail for a great sin, some *Requiem* for a lost hope or a lost liberty; but then the minor strain is the exceptional note, for the whole Psalter is one exultant burst of song. How they linger over the refrain, 'For His mercy endureth for ever!' How they peal out their Alleluias; for the Psalter closes with a Hallelujah Chorus. What volumes of praise swept up from the temple, with its orchestra, on the high-days, of nearly four thousand, and all kinds of instruments! So did Israel sing her *Venites*, with clang of cymbal to mark the time; her voices, like the sound of many waters, praising the great Jehovah, who, dwelling in the high heavens, yet made Jerusalem His habitation.

If the Old Testament gives us psalms and antiphons, the New Testament gives us songs set in still higher keys; for we have no sooner crossed the threshold than we hear angelic choruses and solos in the sky, the *Glorias* of the heavenly host; and as we listen we hear their earthly echoes in the Advent Psalms, the *Magnificat, Benedictus,* and *Nunc Dimittis*. So did the singers of the New Dispensation build their villages around Jerusalem; but as they weave their chaplets of song, it is to lay them at the feet of the Christ, or to wreathe them above His manger and His bitter cross. Christianity was thus cradled in song. The atmosphere of song is her native air; and today, if religion has no monopoly of music and of song, the fact will not be disputed that the greatest masters of song and their greatest productions are consecrated to religion. The *Creation* of Haydn, the *Israel in Egypt* and the *Messiah* of Handel, the *Redemption* of Gounod, the *Passion Music* of Bach, only prove that deeper truth which is hidden in our text, that to sing their highest and their best, songs that will outlive the centuries, the singers must turn towards Jerusalem, taking their inspirations from above. They must consecrate both gifts and songs to religion and to God; for those are the songs

that soar the highest and live the longest which have within them a crucified and eternal Christ. Other songs will soon sing themselves out, dying away in the silence, and the new hymn-book will not know them; but these red-lettered hymns—such as 'When I survey the wondrous cross,' or 'Rock of ages, cleft for me,' or 'Jesu, Lover of my soul'—these will outlast time itself, singing of Jesus and His Calvary until earth itself has vanished, and the last saint has entered heaven.

And now it is our turn, as we are called to keep up the songs; for the singers to-day lodge in the near suburbs of Jerusalem. The service of the sanctuary offers the noblest use and the highest consecration of those gifts of song which many of you possess. And here, as everywhere, we must give God our very best. Nothing inferior should come into His house. There should be no falsetto voice here, nothing but the clear resonant tone of sincerity and feeling. We may indeed keep to the concert pitch, throwing off our songs in accurate time and tone; but this is not enough. Heaven tests our singing with the stethoscope. It is the heart-tones, and not the chest-tones, which strike up against the heavens; the rest drop to earth, all soulless and dead.

> By the heart must be expended
> What shall work upon the heart;

and what does not come from the heart, but is only thrown off carelessly from the lips, while to the human ear it may be most artistic, to the ear of Heaven it is hard and brassy, like the noisy clang of the cymbal, or harsh and strident as the croak of the raven. That was a good and wholesome injunction the Council of Carthage, in the fourth century, laid upon its church-singers: 'See that what thou singest with thy lips thou believest with thy heart; and what thou believest in thine heart thou dost exemplify in thy life.' If we sing God's praise truly we must, as the Apostle says, 'sing with the spirit'; which does not mean that we sing with vigour and sprightliness, but that we be in full accord with that great Spirit, that Holy Spirit who inspires the song and then inspires the singer. And if that Divine Spirit fills us, giving us a mind to see and a heart to feel the truth, and giving us a vivid realization of the abiding and glorious Christ, then we shall strike those deeper springs of gladness and of song, as we 'make melody in our hearts to the Lord.'

Brethren, the day-light fades. The evening shadows are falling, and some time, it may be

soon, the earthly sanctuary will be left for the last time, and the great silence will envelop us which overtakes us all. And what then? Ah, the heavenly temple,

> . . . Those halls of Zion,
> All jubilant with song,
> And bright with many an angel,
> And all the martyr throng!

See, the white-robed singers take their place! and hark, they sing a new song! It is the Song of the Lamb, 'Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.' That is the song eternally new. Shall we sing it? Yes, we will; for some day, when the battle is fought and won, we too shall join them, as

> From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
> Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
> Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
> Alleluia!

And the great company will sing it, and eternity will repeat it, 'Alleluia, Amen!'

VIII

THE MAKING OF AN APOSTLE

VIII

THE MAKING OF AN APOSTLE

And when Jesus beheld him, He said, Thou art Simon, the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.—JOHN i. 42.

WHEN Andrew brought his own brother to Jesus I do not think he had a very difficult task. That Simon was down here by the Jordan, far from Bethsaida, shows that he was an earnest seeker after truth. He had come to learn from the Baptist of that kingdom of heaven which was at hand; and when Andrew told him that he had found the Messias, the Christ, that word struck upon his heart like a clear bell; for it was the *Angelus* that called him to matins and that rang in a new dawn. Jesus admired the man. Beneath the rugged but honest exterior He saw remarkable latent powers—that there was the making of an apostle in him; and immediately He gives Him a new name, which is the prophecy of his future self,

reading into a word all that massive strength which shall yet grow out of a present instability and weakness. The new name Cephas, or Peter, was not directly to displace the old; it is something in reserve, something he must grow up into. And so we find the Simon lingering right through the Gospels; and even up to the last it is 'Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee,' 'Simon, son of Jona, lovest thou Me?' But when we open the Acts, and the fires of Pentecost play, the Simon retires and disappears, becoming but an echo of a far-off past; and the new name takes its place, blazoned on these Scriptures by the finger and by the fire of God. The two names are thus two landmarks, indices of character, reading off the life; the one on its lower and the other on its higher level. Simon is the dialect of the lowlands, when life is ordinary and a trifle dull; Peter is the dialect of the highlands, the life ennobled, consecrated, the life of those 'shining uplands, where God Himself is both moon and sun.' Simon is the name of the natural man; Peter is the supernatural man, nature toned by grace—man with the touch of God upon him and the fire of God within him. Let us then look at these two characters, the Simon of the present tense, and the Peter of the

future; and in the transformation we shall trace out the evolution of an apostle.

'Thou art Simon, son of Jona.' It is a common name, and almost meaningless among the many Simons of Bethsaida. Indeed, it has nothing prophetic about it, and nothing distinctive, except as it leans on the patronymic, 'son of Jona,' which is exactly the 'Johnson' of our idiom. But though he wore a common name, he was by no means a common man, as we see from the many photographs we find in these Gospels. For instance, he was a man of unusual force and energy. He was one of those natures who like to step out into the front rank, who feel it irksome to be in any second row, their vision blocked by the broad shoulders of another. So we find Simon always well to the front; and as the twelve follow Jesus, three names stand out in special prominence, and this is the almost invariable order, Peter, James, and John. He is by tacit consent allowed to be the spokesman for the rest; and if a question is asked, or a suggestion made, it is generally Peter's voice we hear, with the north-country burr in it.

But with this positiveness and strength of character he was a man of intense feeling, the man of impulse and of deep emotion. And the

two characteristics do not generally go together; for sometimes your strong-willed man is hard, cynical, with a deal of iron in his nature; and the heart, instead of being a fountain of generous impulse, is only a glacier cavern, passionless and cold. In the heart of Simon the emotions were easily stirred; and this was perhaps the one weakness of his nature, that his impulses were not sufficiently under restraint. They would sweep down in a sudden freshet, carrying him away, and silencing for a time the calmer voice of reason. And so he was impetuous, hasty, plunging madly into the sea to go to Jesus; and drawing his swift sword in the Garden. It was this intensity of feeling that gave him his magnetic charm; it was the heat and glow of his fervid nature which, touched by the fire of God, became the pillar of fire which lighted up the new Exodus. I said that Simon was the name of commonplace, our mean earth-level, and so it was; for in these Gospel days Simon seems but an average man. He does nothing heroic. He casts his hook into the sea for the fish with the silver stater; he lends the Master his boat; he goes with John to untie the ass, and to prepare the guest-chamber, and these are his main achievements. Nay, more than once Jesus has

to rebuke him. 'O thou of little faith,' He says, as He lifts him, terrified and drenched, out of the water; while He says, 'Get thee behind Me, Satan,' when Simon, too forward, and half-impertinent, suggests that He should in some way evade the cross.

Such is the Simon of the Gospels, this growing but immature apostle, the man who, like Nebuchadnezzar's image, was a strange amalgam of brass and clay, of strength combined with weakness. And the weakness seems to predominate; for the closing chapters of the Gospels tell us of his sad fall and cowardly denials; while the last chapter of all tells how Simon, when he said 'I go a-fishing,' had serious intentions of throwing up the apostolate, and resuming his old business.

Let us turn now to the new name, and see how the Simon became Peter; and as we survey the intervening spaces and processes we shall see an apostle in the making. With these rare natural gifts why does not Jesus pass him at once up to the apostolate, letting him wear his new order of merit? Why does He keep him still in the novitiate, putting him, as it were, on his trial? It is because as yet he is an incomplete man. The supernatural side of his character must be

developed; and before he wears the new name he will have to wrestle with God's angels, aye, and wrestle with himself, and prevail. To his great natural gifts there must be added supernatural gifts and powers. And first among these will come Faith. To be an apostle, whether a Peter or some James the Less, was to be a seer of the invisible, a prophet of the unseen. But so far the realm of Simon has been the realm of the material and visible. The horizon of his vision had been narrow, with no wide outlooks, no great elevations. This little lake, with its rim of encircling hills, has been the narrow space in which his thoughts and life have been impounded. He must learn that earth has other horizons than his own; that there are worlds beyond this world, whose skies are deeper, vaster than these near skies of his, in which he reads the passing clouds. He must learn to look at things unseen by sense; the invisible must become visible. He must believe in heaven, in God, and he must have a profound faith in Jesus Christ. And Simon had not this at first. It was more a hope than faith which first attached him to Jesus—the hope that He might be the Messiah, for whose advent all hearts were yearning.

And how does Jesus seek to call out and develop that germinant faith? He does not tell them at once all that He is and all that He can do. He does not give them an apocalypse that will blind them, but He grades the light, stopping it down, as it were, and so adjusting it to their growing powers of vision. He says, 'Come with Me, and I will show you wonderful things.' And He does. They hear Him speak as never man has spoken. They see Him work miracles without number, issuing His writs, which pass unhindered and unchallenged alike in the worlds of matter, mind, and morals. He takes Simon, James, and John into the chamber of death at Capernaum, that they may see death abolished and immortality brought to life. He takes the three up to the Holy Mount to see His transfiguration glories and to hear celestial voices. Then He examines him upon the lesson, asking 'Whom say ye that I am?' And Simon answers in a moment, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of God.' His thoughts have risen to the higher level. Jesus was to him a Teacher come from God; He was a Prophet, mighty in deed and word; He was a local, temporal Messiah; but now his faith had grasped a higher truth—a truth which flesh and blood

had not revealed to him; for Jesus is now 'the Christ, the Son of God.' And when we come to listen by the gates of these Acts, and we hear Simon's voice there, he gives to Jesus the Name

> High over all,
> In hell, or earth, or sky,

He is the holy and righteous One whom ye denied; the Prince of Life whom ye slew; the Stone which ye builders set at nought, but which has become the head of the corner. Nay, He is the world's one and only Saviour; for 'there is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved.' And see the man's marvellous faith! He takes the hand of the lame man by the Beautiful Gate, and says, 'Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I unto thee; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk!' He steps into the sick-chamber, where Æneas has been bed-ridden for eight years with the palsy, and bending down over him, he says, 'Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole!' Ah, it is not Simon now. It is Peter, the Rock-man, the Rock on which tired souls may lean; the Rock whose very shadow is light and health and peace; and wherever Peter goes, this Living-stone, he is a Bethel stone, uprearing ladders of light against the sky, parting the heavens,

and beckoning down to souls that wake the very angels of God.

Again, before the Simon becomes Peter another gift must be added, that is, Love. The early Simon brought only a curious, inquiring mind to Jesus. Then curiosity grew into wonder, then respect, then esteem, then love. But while the love was there, it was neither deep nor pure. The gold of his affection was of a low-carat quality, alloyed with a strange love of self. And so Simon nursed his proud ambition—hoped and sought for place and promotion. Jesus was not to him as a central sun, around which his thoughts and plans should revolve. Instead of setting Him in the centre, he put Self in the centre, and Jesus at the circumference, as if He were but some satellite of a moon, shining for his little world alone. But Calvary transfigured that love, taking out all its earthiness and selfishness; and when the lesson is learned, Jesus questions him upon it. He bids him sit down at His fire, and looking him full in the face, He asks, 'Simon, son of Jona, lovest thou Me?' Three times He puts the burning, all-important question; and only as Peter answers with a passionate earnestness, 'Thou knowest that I love Thee,' does Jesus give him his commission for service, 'Tend

My sheep;' 'Feed My lambs.' The man of rock must be the man of love, a love that is all-absorbing and all-commanding.

Brethren, if we would be in the true apostolic succession, minding the fold, and feeding the flock of Christ, we must come back to apostolic precedent. We must learn that love is the main qualification for successful service. A weary thing is it to put on the shepherd's dress, to borrow the shepherd's attitude and voice, without the shepherd's heart. How can we feed the flock of Christ if we ourselves are strangers to the heavenly pastures, with no key to unlock them, no eye to discern them? Strange apostles, strange shepherds of the flock are we when duty takes the place of love—when the soul which should be an altar for the sacred fire is nothing but a funeral urn, enclosing a few dead ashes. Simon could not do much for Jesus. Instead of being a fisher of men, he was fishing for himself, in the sacred waters angling for pre-eminence, authority, and privilege. Simon could not die for Jesus. He said that he could, and then ran away. He could not speak for Jesus when words were wanted most; but he fell back into Agnosticism, and said he did not know the Man! But Peter can speak for Jesus any-

where; aye, he can die for Him; for the love He bears to Jesus makes his prisons to be palaces, his sorrows, joys; while it transfigures the cross itself, the cross on which he sheds his martyr-blood, making it another Beautiful Gate, with higher services and eternal songs behind it.

And now what more is wanting? With all these gifts of nature, and love, and faith, these gifts of grace, shall we not pass our candidate forward to his new name, and to the immediate and active service of which that name is the prophecy? Shall we not bid him 'Go! haste, ye apostle of the Cross, for the redemption is accomplished?' No, not yet. There is one thing lacking still. One of the hardest and most beautiful of our rocks is the granite. It is of igneous formation, belonging to the plutonic family, and is composed of three ingredients, feldspar, quartz, and mica. But you might blend these three ingredients in their exact proportions and you would not have the granite. It wants the subterranean fires to fuse it, and then the loose mass, with its frail shales of mica, hardens into the stone which defies the ravages of time, and which holds in its safe keeping your sacred memorials. So here there is strength, energy, faith, love; but it wants the fire, the fire of God, that sacred

baptism Jesus was to bring. And so Jesus says, 'Not yet: you must not preach, you must not teach, until you have received the fire.' He bids him tarry at Jerusalem, the apostle of faith, and the apostle of love, all silent, until he becomes an apostle of fire. And Simon, the name of the old life, drops away into the fire of Pentecost, and disappears; and Peter steps forward, the cloven tongue upon his head, the fire of God within his soul, to open the gates of light unto the Gentiles, to give us these two epistles, and to write his name on the foundations of the city of God.

Such is the transformation wrought by grace, as the fisherman becomes the apostle. And such are the transformations wrought to-day, as man leaves his old self behind, that he may know and do the higher Will. The rare John Bunyan, the celestial dreamer, was a tinker, his life and speech smirched and sooty as his pans. George Müller, the founder of the famous Orphan Houses near Bristol, the man of wonderful faith and prayer, in his earlier days, as he himself tells us, was a gay votary of pleasure. One of the greatest funerals the city of Liverpool ever knew, with its hundreds of carriages and cabs, was the funeral of a man who was picked up drunk in

the gutter, and who could not read the alphabet. But, reclaimed and converted, he became a bright and shining light for the Master, as the Cabmen's Missionary leading scores to Christ, and winning the esteem and affection of the whole city. The devil leads men downwards, ever to lower levels, until he sets them on the steep slope with the swine. But Jesus leads us upwards, up to respect, to service, to honour; and the life which begins in lowliness and obscurity, and perhaps in poverty, goes winding round and round the Mount of God, and up to the New Jerusalem. That Jesus is here now, and Simon, He calls for thee, 'Follow thou Me!' Shall we not rise, and, dismissing all meaner thoughts and selfish aims, answer, 'Yes, Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest!'

IX

THE ROD OF MOSES

IX

THE ROD OF MOSES

And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? and he said, A rod.—Exod. iv. 2.

DOES it not seem a misfit, something incongruous and out of place, to find Moses here in the desert?—a far descent from those high levels of earlier promise? This child of Providence, around whose baby-head Scripture stays to put its aureole, this child whom Pharaoh's edicts could not slay, who was saved as by a miracle, who was endowed with royal favours, skilled in Egypt's proverbial wisdom, prospective heir to Egypt's throne, that he should be now an exile from land and kindred, living the hard, monotonous life of a shepherd, with nothing better to do than look after a few sheep, it does indeed seem a mean and inglorious end. Yes, and had it been the end it would have been disappointing and inglorious. But it was not. The river never makes a straight line as it flows seaward. It moves along the path of least resistance, with bends and windings innumerable;

while at times it seems only to describe useless circles in the eddies of some backset. But it does advance, and it reaches in time its goal, the sea. So the ways of Providence at times are circuitous and contrary; but the life which is surrendered to the Higher Will, though its course is impeded almost on every side, finds one way unobstructed and free, and through its narrow channel it spreads itself out into the reaches, the Broads of its wider liberties, finding at length its goal and its high destiny. The desert of Midian is but a temporary halt, as the shelving banks throw the strenuous life back upon itself, until, with fuller volume, it leaps its barriers, to make a channel for the Exodus, and to have the histories and the destinies of nations waiting upon it. The Burning Bush marked the parting of the ways. Turning now to the rod of Moses, about which Heaven seems so solicitous, we will consider it in three aspects:

I. As a Badge of Servitude.

II. As a Symbol of Power.

III. As an Index of Change.

I. *The Rod as a Badge of Servitude.* To us there is something idyllic in the life of a shepherd. We see him in the bright colouring of the twenty-third Psalm, leading his flock to

the sunlit pastures, piping to the birds, or chanting his pastorals by the still waters. But when you see an eastern shepherd, as we have seen them on the bleak Judean hills, the disillusionment comes with a kind of shock. His dress is rough and coarse, with an overall-skin to protect him from the inclement weather. His food is of the coarsest, taken anyhow, as the chance of the hour may decide. His rod, with the crook in it, is probably cut from the desert thorn; while his staff, in which our psalmist finds his comfort, is in reality a brass-headed or nail-headed club. Such is the shepherd of real life, when, tearing off all poetic draperies, we get down to plain matter-of-factness.

And so we must picture Moses, as, this early morning, walking slowly before his flock, he leads them to their scant pasture on the foothills of Mount Sinai. But as you see him pass, no longer is the spring of youth in his step. He carries upon his shoulders the weight of eighty years; and forty of those years he has spent in the drudgery of Jethro's service, living a dull, blank life, minding his sheep and goats exactly as he is tending them to-day. Verily it is a far drop from Egypt's fair and glowing promise to Midian's poor and mean realization.

What does it mean that this life should be thrown so far from its true orbit, land-locked in the solitudes of Midian, for forty years shut up, and almost extinguished, in obscurity and silence?

We must go back a little to find the key of the enigma. Even in the palace, with royal favours showered upon him and regal prospects opening to him, his Hebrew sympathies were still deep and strong. One with his brethren, he has felt the iron which has entered so deeply into their soul. Nay, he has had some intimation that he is to be their Deliverer; for Stephen says of him (Acts vii. 25), 'He supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them.' But how is freedom to be won? Does oppression ever bate her claims except by the suasion of force? Are not the sweets of liberty always taken, as Jonathan took the honey in the wood, at the spear-point? So Moses naturally flies to carnal weapons and to human methods; and laying his hot hand upon his sword he strikes the offending Egyptian to the ground. It is his signal for the uprising, the revolt which the hard bondage has made ripe. But his signal is not answered. His own people misread the heliogram he flashes from his sword; and instead of rallying round him as he hoped,

they distrust and avoid him, resenting his interference. Moses had read correctly the divine purpose; he saw the ultimate goal, a free and independent nation; but he had not read correctly the divine hour, or the divine method. He did not allow for the personal element in his observations of the sky, and so there was a wide error of forty years in his calculations. He sought to shake down by mere force the fruit which was not yet ripe, and he found in his unripe fruit, as we always do in ours, neither strength nor sweetness, only acidity, which by its ferment soured the after years. He was too forward. He got in advance of the sun. The fires burned so vividly in his soul that in their light he fancied the day had dawned, when the night had some dark hours yet to run. Unlike Samuel, it was a dream of his own which awoke him, when he thought it was a heavenly vision; and God tells him to lie down again; and with the desert as his chamber, with silence all around and a great darkness overhead, the hasty soul must check its impatience, as it waits for God's sun to rise, ushering in God's great day of redemption.

The plans of Moses failed because they were his plans, not God's. There was too much of the human about them, too much of self; and

God takes the sword out of his hand, and puts in its place this common, home-made shepherd's rod. What became of the jewel-set sword we do not know; these Scriptures hide it away in their sheath of silence. It was not, for God took it; taking the sword out of his hand, as He took self out of his heart and life. And so Moses—the 'servant of God,' as he is pre-eminently named—in the exile and isolation of Midian, serves God still. He accepts the humble appointment which God gives him, and in his lowlier task, mean and monotonous though it be, he works out the Higher Will, finding in his shepherding the Mounts of God. Now from the Bush which is 'afire with God' comes the clear call to the higher service, to lead out the great Exodus and to be the lawgiver for the ages.

The land of Midian is not *our* Promised Land, our Canaan, nor does it lie in our direct way thither; but very often God leads His people round by its solitary, inhospitable shores, blighting their hopes, baffling their plans, and shutting them in to a period of inactivity and comparative loneliness. And especially does this seem to be God's way of dealing with strenuous souls, whose rare gifts and high purposes designate them for some signal service. They find the desert

before they find their desèrt and high destiny. Jesus Himself must go round by the wilderness of hunger and of conflict before He speaks His Beatitudes and announces His great evangel. When Paul, the ardent Pharisee, met Jesus in the way, fired with his new passion, we read that he began immediately to preach Christ in Damascus. But instead of rushing the new champion forward, as probably we should have done, Heaven silences him, sending him round by Arabia, and there giving him three vacant years—years which, as far as these records show, are a perfect blank. John Wesley must go round by Midian before he raises his standard of 'Scriptural Holiness,' and becomes the founder of a Church. His three years in Georgia were three years of conflict, trial, and failure, of which he writes pathetically in his Journal, 'All the time I was in Savannah I was thus beating the air. I fell, and rose, and fell again. Sometimes I was overcome and in heaviness; sometimes I overcame and was in joy.' But not in Georgia did Wesley find his Burning Bush, but in the little meeting-house in Aldersgate Street, London, where he says, 'I felt my heart strangely warmed.' Had not Dante been banished from his loved Florence, doomed to years of poverty,

wandering and exile, the probability is that we should never had his immortal *Divina Commedia;* and had not Milton been strangely led into his realm of physical darkness, his soul shut out from the light of day, we should not have had his *Paradise Lost* and *Regained.* The sweet spices which the Midianite merchantmen carried into Egypt were the exudations of Midian's desert shrubs; and the *Paradise* of our great English poet and the *Paradiso* of the great Italian are the products of their Midian years, the exhalations of a bitter desert experience—spices, however, which will be ever precious and ever fragrant.

We of the smaller lives and narrower spheres may not know very much of Midian; but most of us have wintered there occasionally. Our spirits have chafed when we have been set to a task which was uncongenial—one that we felt was below the level of our powers—and our hearts have been sore with waiting for the greater opportunities and the larger fields for which we felt ourselves fitted, but which seemed so slow in coming. We have had many questionings, and not a few repinings, when some sickness has caught us up from the field of our activities and successes, shutting us up, the mere shadow of ourselves, in some narrow chamber of weakness

and of pain, when God's skies seemed far off and awfully still. Yes, we have known something of the lowly service of the rod, something of disappointed hopes, of baffled plans and enforced silences; when, in our Midian of isolation and desolation, we had no present to speak of, only a past, whose bright memories we re-lived, and a future, whose scanty hopes we tenderly cherished. So let it be, since Heaven wills it. Our present discipline is only fitting us for some future service, the desert solitudes making the after years vocal and musical; and when God's hour comes, some Burning Bush will wake us from our reveries, and a clear Voice, which we cannot mistake, will bid us forward to the task we longed to undertake, but could not. Till then we must bravely bear and patiently wait; watching for the signal, but not impatient if it delays; in our shepherding doing the next duty, though it be a lowly one, with a cheerful, buoyant hope and even mind; as Milton commemorates his three years of blindness, speaking of 'those eyes which bereft of light their seeing have forgot,'

> Yet I argue not
> Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot
> Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer
> Right onward.

II. *The Rod as the Symbol of Power.* It would

only be an ordinary shepherd's rod, knotty, crooked, and oily with constant use; and its service so far has been tame and commonplace—making a staff for this strange shepherd, and helping him to count his flock, as at evening they passed under it into the fold. But see it now! Thrown on the ground at God's bidding it becomes a live, fanged serpent, and Pharaoh trembles, and magicians fly before it. It says to the waters of the sea, 'Stand back!' It says to the waters of the rock, 'Come forth!' and like a bâton held in some unseen Hand, the rod of Moses, now the rod of God, gives the time for the whole orchestra of nature, and even the lightnings play at its beat! Wonderful change! And as we see it aweing the palace of the Pharaohs, rending mountains, parting seas, we can scarcely think it can be the same rod that lay on the ground as the shepherd slept beneath the stars, the very same as in its native bush rested the wing of some tired desert bird, or swayed to the wailings of the desert wind. What an ennobling and exalting of common things is here! Had it been a gilded mace or jewelled sceptre which Moses held in his hand, God would have bade him lay it aside; it would have been too grand, too imposing. But since it is only a

common rod, insignificant and plain, God says, 'Give it to Me, and it shall be the symbol of My power, the badge of your authority.' And such it became. There was nothing in the rod itself—no charm of magic, no charge of subtle, occult power; but it was the visible symbol, divinely chosen, of the great power of God, which is omnipotence. And the rod itself was all-powerless apart from the hand which grasped it; the human hand indeed, but the hand of a consecrated soul, a man out of whose thoughts and plans Self has completely vanished, and who is now wholly surrendered to the divine Will.

The lesson for us is briefly this: No instrument is too small for God to see or too weak for God to use. It may be too great, too elaborate, but never too insignificant; for this is God's preference. He chooses what the world calls 'the foolish things' to confound the wise, the weak things to confound the mighty, and 'the things which are not to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.' Nor is there any life, however lowly, that is wholly given up to God, made radiant with His indwelling, but will wield a power far, far beyond its natural abilities. A man cannot ally himself with God without experiencing an elevation of

thought, an ennobling of purpose, an uplifting of the whole life. He may be but a ploughman in the furrow, following his oxen with heavy step; but let the prophet's mantle gird him, and Elisha steps out of his narrow furrow to rebuke kings, and to walk with God. He may be only a miner's son; but as Luther nails his theses on the gates of Wittenberg the sound of his hammer reverberates afar, and wakes a slumbering world. He may be only a waiter in a Gloucester public-house; but let Whitefield step up among the prophets and he sets two hemispheres in a blaze, and makes the hill-sides of Wales blossom with churches. It is something in life to have the inspiration of a strong will; it is more to have the inspiration of a noble purpose; but nothing so ennobles life, or so beautifies it, as the indwelling of the Deity. That life, like Moses' face, will shine; though, like Moses, it wists not that it shines, and is all unconscious of its own brightness.

III. *The Rod as an Index of Change.* What became of Moses' rod? We do not know. We search for it, but cannot find it. It drops out of the sacred narrative as a star from the sky, leaving only a trail of light to show where it once had been. And when we meet with this

people beyond the Jordan, instead of a shepherd we have a warrior leader. The rod has made way for the sword. Tenacious of the past, as the Hebrews have always been, they might have said, 'We must take the rod with us. Better leave the ark behind than leave that. There are enemies to fight more stubborn than Amalek; there are rocks to strike more flinty and hard than that of Massah; we must have the rod, even though we have no Moses.' But the Jordan parts without the rod. Jericho falls without it, and Israel wins victory upon victory, even though the all-powerful rod is left behind and lost. Yes, it had done its work, it had had its day. Born in the desert, in the desert let it die, and in the desert let it be buried. Carried across the Jordan it had only been a misfit, a mistake, an out-dated anachronism, like some ghost of a dead Past, which wanders aimlessly about, a stranger in the home which knew it once, but which now knows it no more.

Need we apply the lesson? The divine changes not, but the modes of its manifestations vary. Truth is truth, to-day, to-morrow, and for ever. Principles are eternal; but forms alter, formulas become extinct or effete. The soul retains its identity, but it changes its body again

and again before at last it throws it off completely. History repeats itself, so they say; but God does not. Heaven issues no duplicates. Heaven's shadow keeps moving, nor does it move backward, covering the same ground twice; it is forward, ever forward to different figures and to different times. Some people worship the Rod. They swear by a dead Past. To them there is no future but of decay, and no present but one that is warped and wrong. They speak of the hoar of antiquity, when it is nothing but a mould which would be better scraped off and quietly interred. They embalm some old form or old dogma, and call it a Pharaoh; but it is only a mummy, which cannot speak at all, and which knows nothing of the dialects of to-day. 'The old is better' was said of wine, but of nothing else. The altar, built here and there by patriarchal hands, the tabernacle, the temple, the synagogues and churches—these show the advances of divine purposes, the successive outgrowths of the divine mind. We think we have got to the last, the outermost; but who knows? The rod, the sword, the sceptre, mark successive eras of progress; and all down the ages

> The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
> And God fulfils Himself in many ways;

and one by one our rods are left behind, buried in the deep silence which overtakes all earthly things. So too is it with ourselves. Our work, badly done at the best, will soon be all done. What is earthly of us will go home to its parent dust; and what is heavenly, this inbreathed spirit, will pass up and up, to find some higher service within the vail, and to spell out those deep words, Immortality! Eternal Life!

X

THE THORN IN THE FLESH

X

THE THORN IN THE FLESH

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.—2 COR. xii. 7.

OUR New Testament is mainly the record of two lives; one the life of Jesus Christ, the other that of the Apostle who liked to call himself 'the slave of Jesus Christ.' Of course there is between the two an immeasurable distance; for one is the divine life, while the other is a human life—but a human life exalted and beautified in its strivings after the divine. And so it is scarcely right to compare the two, any more than we should compare the heavens with the placid lake, which gives its far-off and tremulous reflections of sky and stars. Still, there are points of correspondence between them, undesigned coincidences, which are interesting to the Bible student. The life of Jesus was con-

fined almost entirely to the narrow bounds of Palestine; the life of Paul was spent in the regions beyond; and, as far as we know, he founded no church within the sacred bounds. The life of Jesus had at its beginning a hasty flight into Egypt; the life of Paul had its flight into Arabia, and its three years of exile there. The life of Jesus, counted in earthly figures, was about thirty-three years; the true life, that is the Christian life, of Paul was about the same length. The life of Jesus had three years of public ministry, and thirty years of seclusion and comparative silence; the life of Paul had thirty years of ardent, arduous service, with three years of comparative retirement and silence. Both lives closed with a martyrdom, one with a cross, the other with a sword; one in the capital of the Jewish world, the other in the proud capital of the Gentile world. So, in like, but inverse ways, did the 'slave of Jesus Christ' follow his Master, delighted to bear His cross, and counting it all joy if he might be allowed to fill up the afflictions of Christ in his own flesh. But Paul not only had the cross of his Lord burned into his very soul; he had, too, a cross of his own to carry about with him in his work—a life-long and painful cross, which no Cyrenean could bear for him.

Let us find out, if we may, *what his cross, or thorn, meant, and how he bore it.*

In the first place, it is certain that it was something physical, and not mental, or spiritual. He speaks of it as 'a thorn in the flesh.' In writing to the Galatians (iv. 14) he says, 'And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected, but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus'; and in the preceding verse he reminds the Galatians how through 'infirmity of the flesh' he had preached the gospel to them. It was not, then, some inward anxiety or pain, which possibly he might conceal, burying its bitterness in the depths of his own soul, beyond the sight and intermeddling of a stranger; it was something outward, only too plainly visible, and which, as it seemed to his sensitive soul, might possibly hinder his usefulness. There are several indications in his epistles that Paul was sadly conscious of certain defects and blemishes in his bodily appearance; and in the second Epistle to the Corinthians he refers, half playfully and half mournfully, to these defects. In x. 1 he speaks of himself in presence—or outward appearance, as the margin reads—as being 'base'; and in ver. 10 he speaks of Corinthian gossip as saying 'his bodily pre-

sence is weak'; while again and again in chapters xi. and xii. he speaks of 'my infirmities,' a word which in its New Testament use always means some physical weakness or disability. The same thing is evidently indicated at the close of his Galatian Epistle, where he uses those words of sublime self-repression, 'Henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks —the stigmata—of the Lord Jesus.' Interpreted by the prevalent custom of those times it means: As the slave wears upon his flesh the marks of his master, branded upon him by the hot iron, so I, Paul, slave of Jesus Christ, wear upon my body the visible, precious brand of my Lord and Master.

So far, then, our path is clear. Can we go any further in this direction? I think we may. Turning to Gal. iv. 15 we find a singular passage, as Paul says, 'I bear you record that if it had been possible ye would have plucked out your own eyes and have given them to me.' Now if this passage had occurred elsewhere we might have thought it was simply the Apostle's way of saying how devoted they were to him. But it is its connexion with the preceding verse which gives it its importance. In verse 14 he has spoken of 'my infirmity which was in my flesh'; and in verse 13

he has spoken of his 'infirmity of the flesh'; and having called the attention of the Galatians to this his thorn, he then says how they were almost ready to exchange eyes with him—implying that his thorn was nothing else than a severe, painful, and somewhat repulsive affection of the eyes. Now let us link this passage with the narrative of his conversion, in Acts ix. Here we read, in verse 8, that when Paul rose from the ground after the blinding light 'he saw no man; but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.' In verse 9 we read that 'he was three days without sight'; and in verse 18, when his sight returned, we read, 'there fell from his eyes as it had been scales.' It is true this temporary blindness was caused by the effulgent glory of the vision—his eyes were darkened by excess of light; and it is true this excessive glory did not last for long. But would it not be likely to leave its permanent effects behind? The lightning's flash is but a transient glory—you may put many of them into one second—but the tree is shivered and charred; and though it partially recovers, it cannot fill up the rent or wipe out the scar. And so Paul carries away from Damascus a memento of his great transition. Like Jacob, he too has been wrestling with

Heaven, and the unseen Angel has flung him to the ground; and as Jacob went forth halting and limping from his Peniel, where he had won his new name, so Paul must carry with him an impaired vision, the 'marks of the Lord Jesus,' written on his face by the light that outshone the brightness of the sun.

Again, the verse which speaks of the thorn tells also of an 'abundance of revelations,' which had been given to him when he was caught up to the third heaven, hearing and seeing things he was not allowed to tell; and he says the thorn was given because of these revelations, lest he should be 'exalted above measure.' Now, when and where were these abundant revelations? We cannot find them. Some say it was during his stay in Arabia; others, that it was at Tarsus, after his visit to Jerusalem. But this is pure conjecture; there is no line of Scripture on which to base it. But Paul himself speaks in another Epistle of 'revelations,' using the same word as that he connects with his thorn. In Gal. 1 12 he writes, 'I neither received it (the gospel) of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ'; while in verse 15 he writes, 'But when it pleased God to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen,

immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.' Here, then, are the visions, when the Lord Jesus appeared unto him by the way; and here are the revelations—the most glorious one at least; for, as he tells us, other revelations followed. But this was the crowning one, when God revealed His Son in him, and when the Lord Jesus spake to him from the burning sky, taking his heart captive. And when would the eyes of his soul be more fitted to gaze upon the unveiled glories of Paradise than when the scales shut him from this lower, lesser world of ours?

Here then, we think, is the clue to Paul's great trouble. The thorn was a severe affection of the eyes, a species of ophthalmia, which in the East is often seen in distressing and almost repulsive forms. It impaired his sight; marred his personal appearance; and besides being the source of constant pain to himself, it was a great drawback in his public ministry—at least, he thought it to be such. This being so, we can understand several things which otherwise would be obscure and perplexing. We can understand, for instance, why Paul should always be accompanied by an attendant in his long and frequent journeys; and why he was not able to recognize the high-priest

that day, though he stood close beside him; and why his epistles should be dictated to some amanuensis; and why, when the Apostle did write himself, it was in large, round-hand characters, as he intimates at the close of his Galatian Epistle. His eyes, as Faber puts it, were 'so sore and bleared and winking.' In such sharp and painful ways was he reminded of the 'abundance of the revelations' God gave him more than fourteen years ago.

And now to the practical question, as to *how Paul bore his cross, or thorn*—for the word may mean either. Well, at first he misunderstood it. It was a sore trouble to him. It made him so helpless and dependent. It took away so much of the brightness from his life. It gave him the constant discipline of pain. It exposed him to the venomed taunts of his enemies, until his thorn in their coarse hands became a very crown of thorns, pressed sharply upon his head, and struck deeply into his heart. He saw in it but a rude 'messenger of Satan,' sent to wound and buffet him. And he chafed under the yoke. It galled and grieved him, and he sought to be delivered from it. He tried all remedies and failed. He prayed over it, beseeching the Lord that it might depart from him; but in vain.

Once, twice, thrice, he sent up to heaven his earnest, almost bitter cry, 'Lord, remove this cup from me. Take away this thorn. It prevents my doing what I would, and what I could. Take it away, not only for the sake of my own comfort, but for the sake of Thy great cause, which suffers through it!' But God did not take it away. He could have removed it easily, in any one of a thousand ways; but He did not care to do so. Instead of removing it He simply replied, 'My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' And in not removing it, God, as it were, made the thorn His own. It was 'a messenger of Satan' no longer; it was part of a divine purpose, working out His sovereign will. Nay, the 'messenger of Satan,' throwing off his dark disguise, became, as heaven's light fell upon him, an

> Angel of light,
> Singing to welcome the pilgrims of the night.

And now we mark a change in the Apostle's attitude and conduct. Directly he finds that the thorn is part of his appointed task, given him of God as a safeguard against danger, as a help in his spiritual life, and so a means of usefulness in his ministry, he never again asks that it may be removed. Three times he did ask this, but

never more. It is God's will for him, His all-wise, all-perfect will, and he accepts it; not resignedly, doggedly, but cheerfully, even joyfully. He sinks his will in the divine Will; and in so doing he chooses what God chooses. Sometimes a grain of sand will work its way in between the shells of the pearl oyster, causing a good deal of discomfort and irritation. It cannot eject the painful, intruding substance; but it sets to work, covering it over with a smooth and bright secretion, until little by little the grain of sand grows into a pearl, a treasure of rare beauty. And such, in the higher alchemies of faith, is the transformation wrought in Paul's thorn; for it becomes now a source of strength and of pleasure. Instead of fretting, grieving over his infirmities, instead of looking on them as a weight and drag, they become to him as wings, bearing his soul aloft, and lifting it to a serener atmosphere, the region of perpetual light and peace. He takes pleasure in them now; he even glories in them; for he has learned the deep secret that his weakness is but the foil on which omnipotent strength may manifest itself; and he learns the truth which sounds so like a paradox, 'When I am weak, then am I strong.'

But descending from these higher apostolic

levels, we find that the same law of compensation runs through our smaller lives; and that, in the wonderful balancings of an all-wise Providence, great gifts, great successes are generally coupled with some sorrow or some pain. Perhaps to most of us who have reached mid-life, when we gather the vintage from the ripe, broad-acred past, there is some little rift in the lute, some sense of incompleteness, some one thing we wish that we have not, or something we should be glad to dispense with, were we allowed. It is some infirmity of the flesh, maybe, as one little wheel of this intricate mechanism has got worn; moving not so easily and smoothly as it did, but with a jerky, intermittent motion. We think how much fuller, richer our life would be if only this were removed! How much more we could accomplish if we were not hampered and hindered by this unfriendly thorn! And we have wished so ardently, and we have prayed so fervently, that it might be taken away. But it is not, and perhaps it never will be; for God does not deem it good to do so. Well, then, accept that discipline of pain, or weakness, as from God, as the little cross He has chosen for you, and given you to carry for Him, and bear it bravely until you learn to bear it cheerfully;

for, as Ruskin says, 'Taking up the cross means simply that you are to go on the road you see to be the straight one, carrying whatever you find is given you to carry as well and stoutly as you can.' So shall we learn to spoil the spoiler, and to lead captivity itself captive. Only let our will be adjusted to God's Will, only let us choose what He chooses, and, leaving the fret and worry behind, we shall get into the swing and rhythm of divine harmonies. The thorn will cease to pain; the weights that bore us down will become as wings, cleaving the upper skies! The cross itself will be transfigured, radiant with divine beauty, and bright with a divine light; and as the brook steals forth from the heart of the glacier, singing as it flows on to enrich the lower vales, so streams of blessing flow from an accepted sorrow, an accepted pain, bringing into the life a strength and beauty it had not known, and a music it had never heard before. It is the 'Lost Chord' of the baffled musician, the 'grand Amen' for which he sighed; for there is no grander Amen on earth or in heaven than the full surrender of heart and life to the Divine Will.

XI

THE CROSSED HANDS

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THE CROSSED HANDS

And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the first-born.—GEN. xlviii. 14.

THE scene before us is one of peculiar and pathetic interest. Jacob, who wrestled with the angel and prevailed, now wrestles with another angel, and does not prevail; for it is the angel of Death steals the light from his eye, the strength from his arm, and lays the wrestler low. But as he is told that Joseph has called, with his two boys, the old man pulls himself together, and sits up to receive them. He then formally adopts Joseph's two lads, Manasseh and Ephraim, as his own children, giving them an equal share in the inheritance with the rest; so that Joseph, in the person of his sons, came into the double portion—the birthright of the firstborn, to which he had been early designated by the coat of many colours. Then

Joseph leads up the two lads for the patriarch's blessing, setting Ephraim at Israel's left hand, and Manasseh at his right. But Jacob strangely crosses his hands, putting his right hand upon Ephraim, and his left upon Manasseh; and then, raising his dimmed eyes to heaven, he pronounces his benediction, 'The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.' But when Joseph, thinking that his father had made a mistake, sought to shift his hands, Jacob would not allow him. He had transposed his hands wittingly, purposely; nor was it through any sudden fit of waywardness or caprice; his hands had but swung round to the current of divine purposes, just as the vane swings round to the changed direction of the wind. 'I know it, my son, I know it,' he says, 'He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.' The crossed hands were thus a prophecy; they marked the transposition of these two lives, that each should cross over and take the other's place; which they did—for though they come into that

chamber, in verse 1, as 'Manasseh and Ephraim,' they go out, in verse 20, as 'Ephraim and Manasseh,' and so they are known through all the histories. So did Jacob put on his last will and testament his sign of the cross. Let us see what the strange action means.

Now at first it would seem as if there were a certain fitness in Joseph's order of precedence; for the two names are really crystallizations of his own personal history. When the tide of his affairs was running at the flood, with rapid promotions and enlarging fortunes, he had married Asenath, a daughter of Potipherah, priest of On; and when he named his firstborn he called him Manasseh, which means 'forgetting'; while his second child he called Ephraim, which means 'fullness.' The name Manasseh thus looks back to the past, to the hardship and toil of those barren, disappointing years; and lest he should forget those years, with all their wealth of experience—and he is afraid that he may do—he gathers up their memories and hides them in the name of his eldest born. And so the name Manasseh to him is a sort of funeral urn, enclosing the ashes of a dead, but sacred past. But the second name, Ephraim, or 'fullness," looks around upon this affluent present, when pros-

perity smiles upon him, with the royal signet on his hand, and Egypt's chariots waiting on him. The two names are thus two water-marks; Manasseh, the low water-mark, indicating the lowest ebb of the tide; and Ephraim, the high water-mark, when the flood tide came rolling in, bearing golden argosies upon its bosom, and filling the air with music, as the ripples splashed upon the sands, or the grander waves broke like the play of golden cymbals.

And so, reading off experiences only, or recalling memories, there is a fitness in this order, that Manasseh should stand first and Ephraim second; and had the order been reversed, had Joseph's fortunes come in the morning, and his toil and privations come in the afternoon of life, it would have seemed to us altogether incongruous and out of place. The one is a preparation for the other, leading up to it naturally, if painfully; just as the toilsome ascent, the zigzag path which ever seems turning back upon itself, is the way, the nearest practicable way, to the mountain summit. But Ephraim would not in the same way prepare for Manasseh; its quiet and repose would just unfit the soul for any toil and hardship, for what we call the stress and struggle of life. And so, as far as human experiences go, both in ancient

histories and modern, in sacred and secular scriptures alike, the Manasseh state precedes the Ephraim—the toil going before the fullness, as the cold and biting March comes before the warm June and the ripe August. Jacob himself in his earlier life is an exile, serving a hard master for twice seven years, under the heat by day and the frost by night, his wages on a downward-sliding scale. But time and providence brought him ample compensations. When the sun rose upon him at Peniel he crossed the frontier, leaving the hard, disappointing Manasseh behind. With a new name and a new heart he sojourns in Ephraim henceforth; and in later years Egypt's royal wagons come to take down to Egypt the man who in his youth had trudged his sorry way afoot, and had slept upon the stones!

And such is not the exceptional, but the general experience of life. As in our intellectual life ignorance precedes knowledge; as in our physical life all strength is born out of weakness—for there is no other way of reaching manhood's prime and strength except by the weakness and helplessness of infancy—so God has arranged that toil must precede rest, activity go before repose, and that the striving and struggling must go before possession and enjoyment. Else we

are not fitted for the possession, neither are we capable of its true enjoyment. It was a favourite maxim of Goethe that no man can really possess that which he has not personally acquired; and so he says in his *Faust*,

> He only earns his freedom and existence,
> Who daily conquers them anew.

And it is very true. A fortune inherited is very often a misfortune—except it come in the later periods of life, as something supplementary. It is not a man's very own, save in the narrow, legal sense. It is a debt rather than a property, a something he has borrowed from the past, and which he may have to pay back to the future with all the compounded interest of the years.

Sometimes our young people seek to reverse this divine law; they prefer to skip the Manasseh stage altogether, as they give Ephraim a monopoly of their life-interests. They think they ought to begin just where their father leaves off —on that same high level it has taken him arduous, strenuous years to attain. But this is not wise. The youth who excuses his indolence and his great powers of dawdling by thinking that he can step into his 'father's shoes,' will find that those father's shoes will not fit him; they will be too thick in the sole, and too tight-laced for his

tender feet, giving him many a twinge, and putting a limp in his walk. There are, of course, happy exceptions, but they are the exceptions that make the rule; for it is not well for any life to slip the Manasseh stage. He will endeavour most who is thrown on his own endeavours; and, generally speaking, he will accomplish most who has least done for him. It is the self-made men, and not the ready-made—put together by a few pats of fortune—who make the world's histories, and win all sorts of promised lands. So Joseph is perfectly right in setting Manasseh before Ephraim, the privation before the fullness, the toil before the recompense, the heat and burden of the day before the ample leisure and the quiet eventide; and whether we turn eastward in quest of the Golden Fleece, or westward after the golden apples of the Hesperides, it is not amiss that we tack about in the 'Straits' awhile before we catch the favouring winds or sight the golden shores of our dream and our endeavour.

But here Joseph's thoughts are not the thoughts of Jacob; for he lifts those smooth hands of his, all wrinkled now, and he puts his right hand on the head of Ephraim, and his left hand upon Manasseh. Both are blessed, but Ephraim has

the larger portion; for while Manasseh is to be a father of a nation, Ephraim is to be the father of a 'fullness of nations.' And so Joseph's reading was not correct. He placed them according to the memories they recalled, according to the number of their years; but Heaven read off their characters, the capabilities and potencies which lay behind their names; and in Heaven's order of precedence years count for nothing, the outward appearance goes for nothing; it is soul, it is character that tells. True, we are not able to say where the greater excellencies of Ephraim lay; but we are bound to acknowledge that while Manasseh might be a good, a worthy man, Ephraim was the better, worthier man. And so he passed up above his elder brother, forging ahead, though the backwash of the years was against him, and coming first to the goal. Jacob's crossed hands have thus a wider meaning. They tell us that divine thoughts are sometimes a complete reversal of human thoughts; that the direction in which our purposes move is not the direction in which divine purposes move; and there comes a time when the two currents of purpose cross—or they would cross, did we not fall in with the divine Will, letting our purposes flow in the altered direction, our little

thoughts and plans caught up in the grander sweep of God's higher, wider, and wiser thoughts.

And here we open a field that is limitless, for the reversals of human judgement are all about us; while they lie thickly strewed through all the centuries. Here are two brothers, the one eloquent, the other slow of speech, and a bit of a stammerer. You would say, 'Come forward, Aaron; let Pharaoh hear thy convincing speech, and let Israel hear your song!' But, no; this is not God's way. Dismissing the eloquent man into the eternal silence, He puts His thunders on the lips of Moses, and then inspires them with a song—the song of Moses, which is to be the antiphon of the song of the Lamb Himself! The ancient world worshipped age, throwing its honours and emoluments at the feet of the first-born; but how little does Heaven care for that accident of time, that fiction of primogeniture! And how little our Scripture firstborns accomplish! Esau despises and pawns the birthright, and the younger brother, who can wrestle with God's angels, wins it. Reuben, unstable as water, sinks back into mediocrity; while Judah, the lion-hearted, steps forward to give the world its Shiloh. Eliab, the first-born, stops on the farm, milking the cows and minding the sheep, while

the ruddy David passes up to a throne and a crown. Just so is it to-day, and all days. There is a sense in which the 'child is father to the man'; and sometimes we may prophesy very accurately what the future of life will be. But how often our judgements miscarry! Those whom we had selected for the premier position sink back to some second or third place, or they drop out of sight altogether; while those who seemed to us unpromising and unlikely go forward with a bound, the last becoming first, and the first last. Some natures are slow in developing; they are lethargic and a trifle dull. They are the backward boys who do not show up well at examinations, and perhaps never get a prize; but some day a sudden inspiration seizes them. As if they heard the bugle blast of some great *reveille*, their slumbering powers awake; and, stepping to the front, they out-distance all competitors, making a name which will live when the names of their more promising companions are forgotten. The slow tortoise overtakes the hare; the elder serves the younger; and when, reading the present only, we set our Manassehs forward for distinctions and promotions, the Mind which reads the deeper soul and the farther future reverses our judgement; and with crossed

hands old Father Time brings the larger blessing to Ephraim.

Often in the ways of God's providence we see the same reversals, God's thoughts and man's thoughts moving in directions altogether different, as if Heaven and earth were playing at cross-purposes! The chariots of God—pneumatic-tyred all of them—sometimes run in human ways; we can forecast their directions and record their times. But far oftener they sweep by us on the higher levels of the air, striking right across the ways of men, in lines diagonal with, or even opposite to, the lines of all human reason. Most of the histories of the world, the great movements which have affected the destinies of man, have been written on these slanting lines, as Providence has struck away into new directions. But the new direction has always lain to the right, and not to the left.

And how full of these cross-providences are our lives, as the purposes of God move sheer athwart our path, cutting across our hopes and our bright dreams, and even across our purposes and plans! How seldom does life work out in the actual what it was to us in the ideal! How often, when we have cosily settled down for some long-distance journey, the door has suddenly

swung open, and a hard voice has called out in the dark, 'Change here!' And we have had to change, and, maybe, to wait long before our train came up! And so our life is full of changes, full of surprises, with not a few disappointments. Happy are we if we have learned how to meet them—if, instead of forcing our own way over the Higher Will, or even attempting so to do, we just fall in with that Will; changing, if need be, our directions, as we follow implicitly the new Call, we shall find there God's deeper peace and the larger blessing. A young invalid lady was taken from her Cheshire home to Harrogate for a change of air, hoping it would benefit her health. Returning, she came to New Brighton, intending to remain but a few days on her way home, but there she grew rapidly worse, and she never did reach her home again. I called to see her several times; there was no shadow of impatience or of disappointment on her face, but only the light of heaven's eternal summer. She said to me one day, 'I'm letting Jesus have His own way with me'; and then, looking upwards, she said to herself, 'Lovely, lovely!' 'Letting Jesus have His own way!' Ah, that is the golden key that opens the King's summer-house, that unlocks the pavilion of peace! Or, as Pressensé

has expressed it, '"My will, not Thine, be done" turned Paradise into a desert; "Thy will, not mine, be done" turned the desert into Paradise, and made Gethsemane the gate of heaven.' And that gate stands open for us all. Shall we not seek it and go in?

XII

THE SELF-ASSERTIVENESS OF JESUS

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THE SELF-ASSERTIVENESS OF JESUS

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.—Rev. xxii. 13.

BETWEEN the Christ of the Gospels and the Christ of the Revelation there is an immeasurable distance. In the one it is the human Christ we see, living this earthly life of ours in earthly ways, compassed with human weakness, and subject to all our human needs; it is the redeeming Christ, carrying the world's sin and sorrow upon His heart, and moving steadily on towards His goal, which was a Cross and a Grave. In the other it is the risen, ascended Christ, up in the heavenly places—altitudes which our poor thought may not measure, and amid glories which it is impossible for our poor, stammering speech to tell. And so, before the Revelation closes, with a divine tautology—for the three clauses are but a repetition of one thought—He claims His rightful place of pre-eminence and power, as the Alpha and Omega of

all earthly alphabets, the First and Last, the Beginning and End of all earthly things. Our subject, then, is not, What think ye of Christ? It is the prior question, *What does Christ think of Himself?*

And here we would observe that Jesus sets Himself above all time-relations. His earthly life was but a brief one, not one half of the allotted space of man. He counted only thirty-three of our human years; and thirty of these were silent years. But somehow we feel as if our usual time-conditions did not fit in with His earthly life—as if some element of the eternal had dropped into the problem, giving to the figures wider spaces and larger meanings. Who, for instance, would have thought that He was but twelve years of age, as we find Him sitting at His ease among the doctors of the temple, propounding to them His deep questions? Or who would have thought that the bulk of these Gospels, parables, miracles, and beatitudes is compressed within a three years' limit? Time, to Jesus, seemed richer, fuller than with other sons of men, with unheard-of possibilities hiding in it, as if its moments were hours and its days years. And Jesus did not use our ordinary formulas in speaking of time—at any rate, in relation to

His own life. He has his own chronometers, whose springs and wheels we may not see; and He makes His own chronologies, whose adjustments and measurements, to say the least, are not after the ways of men. He speaks again and again of 'Mine hour,' which is not yet come. But His 'hour' He did not read off from the minutes as we do; He read it from another dial-plate, whose shadow was the shadow of the Cross. And how Jesus seemed to play with the tenses of our 'To Be,' pushing them aside, as He makes past times and future times one far-reaching present, an everlasting now! He says to the Pharisees, 'Before Abraham was, I am'—borrowing the language, and even the very name, of Jehovah! Again He says, as He dismisses His apostles to their task, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,' indicating that His 'I am' is not as ours, shut in and narrowed by these brief moments; it wants a larger sea-room, spreading itself out to the farthest reaches of time, and over into the great eternities. And what is the meaning of that remarkable statement, 'The Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath'? Does it not imply that all temporalities are His own? That He can step down among the days of the week, and re-arrange

them as He will? That, if so it pleases Him, He can disinherit the ancient Sabbath, transferring its dignities and glories to another day? This must have been His meaning; and that His words were no mere boast, an Eastern hyperbole, the nineteen centuries, with their Christian Sabbath, have demonstrated. So does Jesus set Himself above and outside our time-relations; and as He claims a conscious existence with the Father 'before the world was'—that is, before our earth had begun its revolutions round the sun, and so before days and years had begun to be—Jesus sets Himself clear of all earthly years, back in the silent eternity.

Again, *Jesus sets Himself above Nature.* We need not, however, linger upon this point, as it finds ample illustration and demonstration in the miracles which form so large a part of the Gospels. But we may observe that the miracles which Jesus wrought, many and imposing as they are, were not His chief task, His life-work. Indeed, we can scarcely call them His 'work' at all; they were a sort of by-play, asides in the great drama—His avocations, as opposed to His vocation. Jesus came to earth, not to work miracles; He came to live as our Exemplar; He came to preach the New Gospel, which was Himself; and

He lived that He might die, our ransom and atonement. And so His miracles were quite a secondary thing—a largesse thrown in over and above. But with what consummate ease Jesus wrought His miracles, as if our supernatural were natural to Him! How He commands Nature, bidding her forces Go or Come, as He will! here dissolving, there re-forming them; teaching them new evolutions, and giving them new directions. And as Jesus moves on from the Jordan of His baptism to the Gethsemane of His agony, everywhere healing the sick, casting out demons, and even making the dead to live, He leaves on our dark firmament a line of light bright and glorious—another Milky Way, whose deep gold is the lustre of undiscovered suns, and whose brightness is the outshining of the infinities behind! Such was the place of elevation and pre-eminence Jesus claimed, by a right at once natural and divine. He walked the earth a child of Nature, and yet her Lord; her subject, and yet her King; and though man might scoff and crucify, Nature ever paid Him homage, weaving her many crowns for His head, and casting at His feet her goodliest, sweetest things.

Again, *Jesus set Himself above men.* Here let us notice that Jesus does not treat the relation-

ships of our social and family life exactly after our human ways; He seems to readjust them on different lines, introducing new elements into them. 'Who is My mother, and who are My brethren?' He asks one day, when the Virgin Mother herself was standing near; and then He answered His own questions in a way that at first startles us: 'Whoso doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.' The ordinary relations of flesh and blood are too narrow for Him; and with a significant gesture He widens out the family circle, describing it from its new centre, which was the Fatherhood of God. And is not this the true, the eternal relation, the relationship of kindred souls? Nay, Jesus claims the precedence before all earthly relationships, even those we hold the dearest and most sacred. Father, mother, sister, brother—these must stand on one side, and step back to a subordinate position, that Jesus may have the first and foremost place. And so He says, 'Whoso loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me'; while He rebukes the young man, who excuses his delay by saying that he must first go and bury his dead father, answering him, 'Let the dead bury their dead.' Jesus would not

accept a second place; He would not allow either the living or the dead father to come before Him with any prior claim. And how He set Himself above men, above all men alike! He commands; He does not invite. He says to these busy fishermen, 'Follow Me,' and these words bind them to Him as with a chain of gold; and that one voice, like the breath of God, lifts them clear away from their boats and nets, setting their lives on a higher level now. We read, indeed, that in His human childhood He was in subjection to His parents; but that was the only subjection He knew. Obedient He was to the Father, even unto death, but He rendered no obedience, as He paid no deference, to man; nor can we find one solitary occasion where Jesus obeys any human mandate. He walked the earth an uncrowned King, whose word was authority and whose will was law. Here are schools of medicine, where men study the anatomy of the human frame, the causes and symptoms of disease, and the potencies of herbs. True it is but an elementary school, a kindergarten of child's play as compared with the advances of modern science; but it was the best the age afforded. But Jesus is more and greater than all schools of medicine. His cures are certain and immediate; and when

the 'many physicians' have done their best and failed, Jesus does His least and succeeds; with but the touch of His garment's hem setting afloat again, on smooth and sunny seas, the wrecked humanity which the tides of fortune and the cruel ways of men had left for twelve years stranded on a desolate shore.

Nor was it in the school of science only, but in all the schools of human life and thought, that Jesus took—and that with no pertness and forwardness, but with a simple naturalness—the uppermost seat. Here He was no learner; He was a Teacher, a Teacher of teachers. How He reproves the Pharisees, and rebukes the Scribes, the men who represented the intelligence and culture of their nation! How easily He confounds them! How effectually He silences them, as He impales them on the horns of His dilemmas! And what confidence and authority there were in His speech! so different from the hesitating, meandering ways of the professed teacher! He spake as if He knew all earthly and heavenly verities, as if He Himself were truth incarnate. Nor is Jesus content to occupy Moses' seat, sitting among the Doctors of the Law; He even sets Himself above Moses, actually amending the laws which Moses

gave. The fifth chapter of St. Matthew opens with the Beatitudes; and here Jesus sits on a lower Mount, one of the foot-hills of the Mount of God. But let us read past the Beatitudes, and now Jesus seems to climb a higher Mount, even Sinai itself, proclaiming His new laws, which shall have all the sanction and divine authority of the Sinaitic tables. Claiming the right to fulfil the law, that is, to fill it up and make it complete, He goes on, with a strange egoism, to state the points in which He will amend the law, carrying it beyond the overt act to the covert thought and impulse, as He condemns lust and anger. Nine times in this chapter Jesus claims for His own words an authority greater than that of tradition, and even greater than that of Moses; and as He says, nine times, 'Verily I say unto you,' putting all emphasis upon the personal 'I,' it is nothing less than the thunders of the new Sinai, where Jesus stands on an elevation Moses never reached. For Moses only received the Law—he took care to state that 'God spake these words, and said'; but Jesus is Himself the Giver of the law, and He seeks no higher sanction than that of His own authority; His own autograph, His 'I say unto you' is enough.

And as Jesus set Himself above all teachers, so He places Himself above all priests. He speaks of the temple as if in some way it belonged to Him; it is 'My Father's house,' in which He has a personal, proprietary interest. Here He is perfectly at home. He sits over against its treasury, assaying its gifts, and rating at their true values the gold pieces of the rich and the bronze farthings of the widow. He walks its courts freely, 'as to the manner born'—as if they were but the flower-edged lawn of His Father's garden. He heals the sick among its porches, drives out the money-changers, stops all worldly traffic, even to the carrying of a basket through its gates; and when the priests would hush the Hosannas of the children, Jesus simply takes no notice of their angry request; and while He permits the children to sing on, He shuts the mouths of the priests by a quotation from their psalms! Such is the authority Jesus wields over the temple itself—an authority which is supreme, recognized and feared even when questioned. Nay, Jesus avers that He in His own person is more than these courts, more than the altar, more than the Holy of holies, which within the veil is silent in the thick darkness; for when He tells the Pharisees that He is Lord of the Sabbath day, He

adds, 'I say unto you that in this place is One greater than the temple.'

So does Jesus claim to be the Alpha of all alphabets, in priority and pre-eminence the first among men. 'A greater than Jonas,' 'A greater than Solomon is here,' He said, magnifying Himself, and making the 'I' of His own personality large and imposing. And such He was indeed, first among the foremost, greatest among the great. We have read of a German palace in which was a hall of a thousand mirrors, and these were so arranged as to give a simultaneous reflection of any object presented to them. Let a visitor step within that hall, and he sees a thousand reflected images of himself; and let him but raise his hand, and a thousand hands answer to his own. So does he find his own shadow reflected and manifolded. But here in these Gospels is another hall of a thousand mirrors; and as Jesus steps within He throws the shadow of His august and imperial Self on every side and on every thing; and all earthly statures are shortened, and all human characters are dwarfed in the greater magnitudes and glories of the overshadowing Christ.

And now what shall we do with this Jesus, this all-lovely and all-commanding One? Shall we,

as some do, array Him in choice purple, weaving our seamless robes of blue and gold, and then set Him on Pilate's stairs, as we cry, '*Ecce Homo!*' Behold the man? Shall we applaud His goodness, admire the beauty of His character, and yet withhold from Him all divine dignities, keeping Him down on the lower level of the humanities, as a good, a holy, an ideal man? Ah, we cannot do that. If Jesus is but a man, then He is not an ideal man, He is not even a good man. If Jesus is but a man, then He is the most assuming, most egotistic man that ever lived; and these vaunted claims of His, these high assumptions, are nothing more than the puffings-up of a vain self-conceit. But let Jesus be what He claims to be, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, and now how natural is the language in which the 'I' is struck so loud! How true it is, and exquisitely beautiful! As Dr. Watson says, in his *Mind of the Master*, 'This "I" that sounds from every sentence of the teaching of Jesus is not egotism, it is Deity.' And it *is* Deity; though at the same time we should call it a divine egoism, an egoism that befits the Deity.

And it is here, on this high level, that Jesus sets Himself, far above all humanities, far above

all principalities and powers, side by side with God—His eternal, co-equal Son. He says, 'I and My Father are One'; and when He dismisses the apostles to their task, He writes His name in divine characters above heaven's highest throne, as the Second Person of the one blessed Trinity; and He bids them 'Go . . . and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' And from that high throne He stoops to ask our love, to claim our homage and our service. Shall we not give it? Shall we not make Him in our hearts and in our lives the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last? Yes, we will strike for Him our loftiest songs, live for Him our noblest lives, making our life, redeemed and surrendered, one long and sweet Alleluia! And when we reach the highest heavens, the Church of the First-born, we shall still, and for ever, turn our faces and our songs toward the throne of the exalted Jesus, the Lamb once slain, but now eternally enthroned!

XIII

THE HOUSE OF GOD

XIII

THE HOUSE OF GOD

And the sanctuary of the Lord shall be in the midst thereof.—
EZEK. xlviii. 10.

IN this vision of the prophet, he sees a coming redemption and restoration of Israel. Its tribal boundaries are readjusted and enlarged; while dominating all the tribes, their one central glory, is a city of large proportions, the New Jerusalem, or, as he re-names it, Jehovah-Shammah, which means 'the Lord is there.' It is easy to see that Ezekiel's city is a prophecy of that new Israel which God shall gather to Himself out of all kindreds and peoples, that city, or commonwealth, of elect and obedient souls. But when the prophet measures his new city, with its far-stretching suburbs, and the gate through which only the Prince must enter, he is careful to tell us of the Sanctuary which is to be the crowning glory of the city; and, as if the position of its site were both important and significant, he three times states that the Sanctuary shall be 'in the midst,' in its very centre and heart; the

Lord's house, overlooking all houses, and commanding alike the streets of traffic and the markets of trade. And that this was a divine direction we may learn from these inspired histories; for when the tabernacle was reared in the wilderness it was placed in the centre of the camp—the stamen of the flower, resplendent in purple, blue, and gold; while the tents of the tribes circled about it as an orderly, symmetrical corolla. Let us then inquire:

I. What the Sanctuary means to us.

II. What the Sanctuary demands from us.

I. *What does the Sanctuary mean to us?* Is there any real use or necessity for it? If God is everywhere present, in the high heavens and in the uttermost seas, is it not a superfluous thing, if not an impertinent thing, that we seek, as it were, to localize the Infinite One, setting bounds and limits about the Eternal? Would not God be a greater God if, instead of reducing Him to our human dimensions, adjusting Him to our finite conditions, we left Him unfettered in the illimitable veldt and the measureless spaces of the skies? Well, when you come to think of it, these limitations in a sense are necessary; for the infinite in itself is unthinkable. Our mind cannot approach it, much less compass it. We

cannot even think of God apart from our earthly conditions of time and space, though we know that He must be above and beyond them. Besides, the Sanctuary does not limit God; it reveals, it manifests His presence. As in the observatory the lens of the telescope, collecting and focusing the scattered light, brings near the far-off heavens, opening to our vision the vast realm of the unseen, so these walls, clay though they may be, become to us as crystal lenses, helping us to behold the invisible. And this they do, not by concentrating those divine beams, that divine effluence which is all about us, but by concentrating our thought upon it; for our thoughts, in this telegraphy, are the coherers, through which the subtle sparks flash out from the unseen, and the heavenly silences speak.

The instinct of worship is universal. In all climes and conditions man feels himself in the overshadow of other worlds. His life is touched by occult powers and forces, all invisible to sense, but most real to his thought and heart; while over all, not afar off, but overlooking his little life, and knowing it altogether, is the Supreme Being, whom he seeks to propitiate and please. And so from the first Religion has sought to put her devotion into stone. By the closed gate of Eden

we see the rude altar of Abel, with the smoke of its accepted sacrifice; while the track of the pilgrim Abraham is marked by his altars of stone, those mile-stones of his heavenward journey, as he stepped out into the unknown, seeking the invisible. Then the altar-germ grew up into the tabernacle, whose curtains covered the ark, and shielded the sacred fire; and this in turn grew up into a temple, a structure imposing and beautiful, a poem of marble and gold, into which Religion wrought her highest and her best.

Christianity at first had no structure. She lodged for a while in friendly upper-rooms and borrowed guest-chambers; she brake bread from house to house, and found her house of prayer by the sea-shore, or by the river-side. But directly circumstances permitted, Christianity, too, began temple-building, setting the sanctuary of the Lord in her midst. Borrowing the lines of pagan temples, she built her basilicas, consecrating them to the Higher Name; and omitting the altar now, superseded as it was by the one supreme sacrifice of the Cross, she built up a chancel instead, letting her temples echo to the songs of a holier faith. Then from the German forests came those master-builders, the Goths, uprearing their lofty pointed arches, and crown-

ing all with its spire, whose mute finger of stone, through all seasons and weathers, should point heavenward, as if it would rebuke that earthwardness of the human soul, which, greedy of pleasure or of gain, has no thought of heaven.

So has God set His Sanctuary in our midst. Towered, pillared, spired, of hewn stone or clay, they meet us on every side; we can scarcely get out of their sight. And week by week they open wide their doors, and say, 'Come hither, man! Rest and refresh yourself! I muffle and deaden for you the world's loud voices that you may hear whispers from the skies and the strain of celestial music. Come, put yourself in the current of heavenly winds, which blow cool and fragrant from the Mounts of God.' Such is the place of the Sanctuary, the meeting-place of earth and heaven. The bright centre of our spiritual and of our social life, it throws its waves of influence within our homes, and offices, and shops, touching the farthest reaches of our life. It is a Bethel —whose visions are not dreams, vanishing with the dawn—where the foot-sore and heart-sore solitary gets among the angels. Nay, it is God's chosen place of revelation and inspiration, as He said, 'Here will I meet with thee, and bless thee.' And His blessings who can number, who

can measure? The psalmist complains that in vain he had cleansed his heart, and washed his hands in innocency; for he was 'plagued all the day long, and chastened every morning,' while the ungodly prospered, and increased in riches. The thought perplexed and troubled him, until he said, 'I went into the sanctuary of God, and then understood I their end.' And what light has broken upon us in the Sanctuary! Here we have found solutions of life's mysteries, solvents for our doubts. Here in this garden the trees of the Lord have distilled their fragrant balms, which have soothed the wounded spirit and quieted its pain. The clear, still air of the Sanctuary has given us the farther vision, wider horizons; while it has made the heavens, which before seemed silent, distant and cold, bend down close over us, all glorious and vocal. Here, time and again, harassed with life's complications, and wearied, like Jacob, wrestling as it seemed against an adverse fate, here in the Sanctuary some unseen Power touched and thrilled you with new life, and faith rose victorious. You had found your Peniel, and all around you were the brightening skies of a new dawn, while within your heart were joys and ecstasies you had not known before. Hezekiah brought the threaten-

ing letter of Sennacherib to the Sanctuary, and opened it there before the Lord; and with the Sanctuary light upon it, that letter lost its terrors, becoming to Hezekiah no more than the music of some pleasant song. So does the Sanctuary of God light up our life—reminding us of the heavenly things which we are prone to forget, appealing to that which is highest and best in our nature; and, above all, bringing us face to face with God, giving us visions of His glory and touches of His power, it levels up our life, giving it higher elevations and loftier aspirations; while it throws over its common and its holy days alike a 'light which never was on sea or land, nor yet in poet's dream,' the light and glory of God Himself.

II. And now, *What does the Sanctuary demand from us?* In the first place, it asks for our sympathetic interest, for our thought and care. The orbit our world describes in its annual revolution round the sun is an ellipse, and the ellipse is a geometrical figure which has two centres, or foci. And as our life swings round its elliptic orbit, it moves about these two pivotal centres, the home and the sanctuary—the one the centre of its temporal, the other of its spiritual realm. No life can be said to be properly ad-

justed, to be true in its movement in God's deep heavens, in which the Sanctuary is not recognized and appreciated as a restraining, impelling, and guiding force. God evidently meant that His house should be first and foremost. It must have a prominent and dominant position. It must stand on a higher elevation than the smaller houses of men, overlooking, and, as it were, commanding them; impressing the mind by arresting the vision, and impressing the heart by its splendours and solemnities. And have you not noticed how careful Scripture is to record those thoughts and deeds and generous gifts which went to the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple in Jerusalem? We hear Bezaleel at his crucible, fashioning the bowls and knops and intricate lily-work. We see the lapidaries polishing the precious stones; we hear the click of the shuttle, the hum of the wheel, as they spin and weave the broidered curtains; while even the toilers of a humbler task, the makers of the rough goats'-hair cloth, are not forgotten. Even they receive honourable mention; for Heaven has a special regard for those who 'take pleasure in the stones of Zion, and who favour the dust thereof.' We read in Neh. xi. 16, 'And Sabbathan and

Jozabed, of the chief of the Levites, had the oversight of the outward business of the house of God.' And the outward business, looking after the fabric, to its material interests, is a necessary business; and though it may seem to have a sort of secular flavour in it, and not to be so distinctly spiritual, it is nevertheless a true and honourable service, which Heaven recognizes and rewards, even if earth does not. The great city of Ephesus was proud to call herself Neokoros, the 'temple-sweeper' of her heathen shrine; and we should call any, even the lowliest, service for the house of God a privilege and honour. Cultivate this templar-spirit, awaking an interest in the house of God. Let it fill a wide angle in your vision. Let it stand out clear and prominent in your thought, as it stands out clear and imposing in the thought of God. Seek to have some personal proprietorship in it, some vested interests; and those you can have by investing yourself, laying yourself out in all possible ways to advance its interests. He who takes stock in Zion, buying up some of her preference shares, will find those shares always at a premium, and her dividends realizing a hundred-fold, or ten thousand per cent.

But, further, we should give to the Sanctuary

reverence. God Himself requires this; and even if He had not said, 'Ye shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary,' the very instincts of our nature would suggest that in our approaches to God, whether in public or in private worship, reverence is the only becoming attitude. We may say what we will, but the devotional feeling is helped or hindered by the style and appointments of the buildings. Some buildings awe you. You feel it to be holy ground, where irreverence would be sacrilege, and levity would be a species of profanity. You cannot say exactly what it is that so impresses you; but you feel that you are on the threshold of the invisible, and that you can almost hear its silences speak. And some Sanctuaries do not so impress you. There is a secular atmosphere about them, and they give neither inspirations nor aspirations. But even here we may carry our own fire with us, a sanctuary in the heart, which shall diffuse its own atmosphere around; and to the worshipping spirit the desert becomes holy ground, and the common bush is 'afire with God.' And we should seek to cultivate this feeling of reverence for the house of God; in our thoughts and our demeanour investing it with those sanctities which are only meet and proper

for the audience chamber of the King of kings. By an ancient constitutional fiction our Sovereign is always supposed to be present in person at sittings of the Privy Council. In forgetfulness of this, two barristers, engaged before the Judicial Committee, some years ago, were lounging and conversing at their ease, when a sharp voice called out, 'Silence, gentlemen! the Queen is here!' Yes, and a true reverence for the house of God only comes from our recollection and realization of the divine presence; and only let us have that vivid realization, and the reverential attitude and behaviour, and tones of voice, will adjust themselves naturally.

Even thoughts of our secular life, its business or its pleasures, should not be allowed to intrude within those sacred precincts; for Jesus, who drove out the money-changers, and who would not allow any vessel to be carried through the temple-court, would certainly rebuke those vagrant thoughts which come trooping and trespassing within the Holy Place, with sheets of prices-current in their hands, and the grime and dust of earth upon their feet. The Mohammedan devotee will stay to wash his feet at the fountain, before he dares to step within the mosque of the great Allah; while the peasants of Siberia will

take off their hats when passing a church. You may call this superstition, but I should call it a reverence for sacred things; and certainly such respect and reverence for the house of God is more becoming and more beautiful than the careless indifference and flippant irreverence which, alas, we often see.

And then we should bring to the Sanctuary *love*. The psalmist said, 'I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth.' When David was shut out from the Sanctuary, he sighed with a passionate longing for the house of the Lord, 'How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord'; and he envied the very birds, the swallow and sparrow, which had built their nests on its walls, within the sweep of its music. I wonder sometimes whether our Zion has the place in our affections that it deserves, whether its very commonness has not depreciated its value? There are men and women, in lands not so favoured as ours, who would gladly walk ten or twenty miles just to attend one service like this of ours. But we appraise our privileges lightly; sometimes allowing any pretext, the call of a friend or a passing summer shower, to keep us

from the house of God. This should not be; and it would not be if we had a true love for the Sanctuary and a delight in its services. In the Jews' Wailing-place in Jerusalem there are still left a few massive stones of their old temple, and a pathetic sight it is to see them touching the mute stones with their forehead as they weep for their fallen temple; and one I saw, as she left the place, touching the wall in her farewell, and then kissing the fingers which had touched the sacred stones. And should we not love our Zion as truly as they—in the busy week looking forward to these hours of privilege and vision we may spend within her courts, and glad to contribute to her services our gifts of gold and silver, and our gifts of prayer and song? For, after all, the only fire of God which burns in the Sanctuary to-day is the fire which burns and glows in the hearts of the worshippers. And let these fires of devotion and love be extinguished, let form and ritual take the place of reality, and though its walls may remain, and outwardly everything may be as before, yet it is the house of God no longer; it is but a mausoleum of an expired love and a departed faith, over whose chancel the Hand out of the Unseen has written, 'Ichabod! the glory is departed!'

And now, in conclusion, may I remind you of another temple, of which this of ours is but a faint and far-off shadow; though they are the same Alleluias and the same sweet songs, for

> They sing the Lamb in hymns above,
> And we in hymns below.

Over that temple dawns one eternal Sabbath; and from its towers of jasper the bells of heaven are calling to the higher service, the service which has no Vesper and no Dismissal. And they come! From our congregations and our family circles they come!

> Ten thousand times ten thousand,
> In sparkling raiment bright,
> The armies of the ransomed saints
> Throng up the steeps of light!

And redeemed, and saved, and kept, they pass within the veil,

> To view the Lamb in His own light,
> Whom angels dimly see,

in heaven's highest, holiest place to 'dwell in the House of the Lord for ever!'

XIV

FALLOW TIMES

XIV

FALLOW TIMES

But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord; thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard.—LEV. XXV. 4.

WHEN Israel was in Egypt, making their tale of bricks under the lash of the task-master, their hearts were not here by the Nile. Possessed by a great land-hunger, they were longing for the country of the promises, where the bones of their fathers lay, as if holding the land in hostage. And when they grew weary of a desert which seemed interminable, Moses revived their drooping courage by telling them of the fair land beyond the Jordan, which he himself might not enter, but which they should possess and enjoy. It was, he said, a good land, and a large, flowing with milk and honey; a land which the Lord their God cared for, His eyes being upon it through all the seasons and all the years. And so it was. It was a land which, by its geographical posi-

tion and its fertility, was fitted to be the theatre of great events, where histories should be made. Hemmed in on every side by barriers of mountain, sea, and desert, it was, so to speak, insulated, so that the divine purposes might pass unhindered through it—becoming the pivotal centre around which the currents of human thought and the worlds of earthly empire should revolve.

In this chapter we have given us the divine instructions as to the tenure of the land and its modes of cultivation. The law of the Sabbath was not only to rule in the sanctuary and the home, it was to extend even to the fields. Every seventh year the land was to lie in fallow. During that year no field should be reaped or sown; while that which grew of itself should not be a personal property, it should be the harvest of the poor, free to all who cared to gather it. And that Israel might be without excuse, by a divine arrangement, which was a perpetual miracle, the sixth year should produce double quantities, so that there should be no lack. Such was the stringent Sabbath law; and when, in after-times of worldliness and relapse, Israel allowed this law to become obsolete, God carried them into captivity—by years of exile and bondage compelling them to make some sort of atone-

ment for the Sabbaths they had stolen from the land.

I do not wish to treat our subject in a literal, historical way; for no practical end would be gained by discussing the question of land-tenure or periodic fallows. I will only say this: that nearly all these regulations of the Levitical code were intended to be of temporary and local application, for the Hebrew commonwealth alone; though down to recent years the seventh-year fallow has been more or less observed. Possibly, too, the harvests of the world would be none the less, but greater, if the old Sabbath law were universally kept; for the comparatively barren years which come to us now and then may be only Nature's peculiar way of balancing the overdraft which man has drawn upon her resources.

But throwing a present-day light upon our text, it shows us *the heavenliness of our earthly years*; that our division of time into days and years is no chance arrangement, no device of human wit or skill, but a divine thought and purpose. And our text shows us, further, that while, to our mind, the years flow out of each other, and into each other, forming a sort of continuity of time, like the river's unbroken flow,

yet in Heaven's reckoning they are kept apart, counted one by one, each having some speciality or distinctive character.

Have you ever thought how closely our temporal is linked with the eternal?—how time *is* eternity, the rhythmic, measured beat of its infinite seas along our shores? It is that bell of sky, so strangely silent, which strikes off our days and months and years; and as our day is determined by the revolution of our earth upon its own axis, and our months are measured by the circles of the moon around our globe, so our year is determined by the completed revolution of our world around its central sun. Man has really no voice in determining these time-distances. He can manipulate the days, and say that this and that Monday shall be a Bank Holiday; but he cannot shorten or lengthen them as he pleases. The lines of darkness and the day-spaces are there, all ready fixed and ruled for him; and what is left to him is the score-music he writes upon them, whether it be an anthem of sweet praise, a Hallelujah Chorus, or a Miserere. So, too, we cannot, by any judgement of law or act of parliament lengthen out our years, or abbreviate them—except in those little re-adjustments, as, by the added day of Leap Year, we

set our time with sidereal time, which is heavenly time. And so our earthly years differ in their length from other planetary years; for could we emigrate to those other worlds we should find that a year of Jupiter would equal nearly twelve of our years; while the orbit of Neptune is so extended that our old man of four-score years would only have seen the half of one of its wide-stretching years, just one spring and summer.

Not only does Heaven determine and measure the years for us, it also arranges that each year shall have constant change—if I may speak in the way of paradox. By a slight dip, or inclination of the earth's axis, as it makes its annual revolution, there is a gradual lengthening and shortening of the days, with that wise and beneficent provision, the procession of the seasons, as winter, spring, summer and autumn divide the year between them. And so these acolytes of Nature's temple keep their appointed times and courses, as, moving up the silent aisles, they wave their censers of differing perfume, or they sing in different keys and measures their sweet part-songs.

There is thus a heavenliness put upon our earthly time; the swift hours and the slow years

alike link us with the infinite spaces overhead and with the silent eternities. Even heathenism recognized this truth, making Saturn, or Chronos, to be the son of Coelus and Terra, heaven and earth; while Jupiter, the god of Power, and Pluto, the god of Wealth, were both the sons of Saturn. So did they pay divine honours to Time, erecting statues and dedicating temples to his glory; and even to the present day we find in heathenism lingering remains of this ancient cult, as the Parsees each new morning salute the rising sun. That salute of heathenism is a graceful and becoming attitude; but the attitude of our Christian faith is a more beautiful one, as beholding the invisible, behind the rising and the setting sun it sees and worship the Eternal, whose omniscient wisdom has measured for us our days and years, and whose ungrudging mercy crowds them with such treasures and crowns them with such blessing. For all our years are years of His right hand; and in the changing beauty of the seasons we see the trailing splendour of His robes, the Eternal One who is in all and over all, God, blessed for ever!

Our text teaches us further: That in the circles and cycles of the years, *fallow-times, resting-times, are a divine provision, and, indeed, a*

divine command. Why Heaven should thus step in each seventh year, putting fields and vineyards as it were in bond, with the seal of a divine interdict upon them, we cannot tell with any certainty; but probably one great purpose of the septennial fallow was to teach them their true relation to the land. It was not freehold. It was not their own absolute property; indeed, it was not a property at all of theirs. They were but tenants at will, leaseholders under their great Overlord, whose terms and conditions they could neither alter nor question, but which they could only accept.

But looking at life in general, when we come to think of it, we are struck with the comparatively wide spaces of its fallow or resting-times. Take our own fields, for instance. In the month of March they are fields of busy-ness, as the soil is being loosened and prepared, prodded into activity by the share of the plough and the sharp teeth of the harrow. The seed is then cast upon it, which, nourished and nursed by the warm earth, grows up into the blade and ear. In six months she completes her task, for in August the reapers come and bear home the golden harvest. Then the land keeps her Sabbath, and, changing her working dress of green and gold for

the Sabbatic russet, grey, or white, she quietly rests, recuperating her wasted strength until March shall come again. Out of the twelve months, six are preparatory, and six productive months. So with our trees. All their leaf-growth, and nearly all the growth of bough and stem, is wrought in the few weeks of early spring. For the rest of the year it seems to pause, marking time, as it were, or ripening its fruit, until October's frosts pluck off the leaves and arrest the flow of sap; and November's winds rock them to sleep—a sleep from which they will not wake till the patter of April showers shall call them back to life and to the intermitted task.

Stepping up to the higher realm of human life, the same law and the same proportions meet us. Life to us is a busy, bustling thing, and present-day competitions and complications make its pursuits arduous and strenuous, so that our world does not seem the same placid world our fathers knew. But with all this, our active, producing hours must always be the fraction, and the smaller fraction, of our life. That Rule-of-Three arrangement of our days, allotting eight hours to work, eight hours to play, and eight to sleep, is, perhaps, an ideal, paradisic state of

life; but, alas! we cannot all secure these favourable terms. But if the proportion of our resting, recuperating hours is not quite two to one, we still give the larger portion to relaxation and recreation; for the outflow of our strength in work is more rapid than the inflow of strength in rest, thus demanding a longer period. Then night by night a beneficent Hand draws the curtain of darkness about us that we may sleep; and it is while we sleep, in helpless unconsciousness, that God's angel of strength glides down to our side, replenishing the spent lamp, and pouring into the emptied cruse fresh draughts of the water of life.

Even this wide-spaced leisure is not enough; for each seventh day a divine command, imperative and universal, compels us to cease from toil. And this is no arbitrary, unreasoning command; it is for our highest and best interests; in part, that worship may lead us up from the dusty ways and toilsome fields of earth up to the hills of God, and to the fountains of heavenly blessing which are there. But at the same time our Sabbath rest is given us and assured to us as a sort of recompense for the weekly overstrain, that the balance may not be on the wrong or debit side.

And with these daily and weekly interludes—these semibreve rests in the music—we are always ready for our annual vacation, when, bidding good-bye to the daily task, which has grown a bit wearisome, the dwellers in the city leave the smoke and grime behind for the wide sky-spaces and the ozone of the sea; and the shore-dwellers fly inland to the hills and the heather-scented moors. Well, it is not lost time, though it seems unproductive, when for a few days we compel ourselves to idleness, giving up ourselves to droning and dreaming, with no more arduous task than playing ball with the children, or helping them to build their castles in the sand. It is well to relax the strain at times, and to shut down all activities. The bow must not be always bent, or it loses its suppleness and its spring. Besides, distance sometimes gives us the clearer, truer perspective of things; and when away from our task, and free from its noise and vibrations, we can often see with a wonderful vividness little but important things about our business which we did not see at all before, or we only saw them indistinctly, in a blur. And so if our off-days seem all unproductive, it is but a seeming; for they give us the power and ability to produce more, the power to work longer and better.

What we want is to bring back the lost accent and the lost meaning to the modern word, and to make our holidays life's holy-days, with new modes of worship, new thoughts of God, and new visions of His heavens, which are ever near and ever glorious to them who set their hearts to seek them.

I said that the law of the septennial fallow was mainly national and local, Judaic in its application; yet I am not sure that we are altogether exempt from its operation; for do we not find these fallow times falling among our business years with a certain periodic regularity? Are there not spaces in every life when production ceases—or if it does not cease, it ceases to be profitable—when with the usual toil, or with a toil more severe, there is no recompense? Years when Nature seems unfriendly and half-morose, when the harvest is scant and poor, not more than the gleanings of other, more affluent years? Yes, we all know these barren times, these times of straitness and disappointment. We call them our 'bad years'; but did we see far enough and deep enough, we might see that these fallow years were growing harvests of other kinds, qualities of mind and heart that should enrich all after-times. They have been teaching our

children lessons they needed to know, lessons of economy and thrift, a right appreciation of values which will serve them well in future years; and very probably it is in our so-called 'bad years' that we lay up the richest treasures in heaven—treasures of character and life which will be an eternal inheritance and joy.

And sometimes sickness throws our life into fallow, as the good right hand loses for the time its strength and skill, and weakness takes the place of strength. The world moves on its usual lines, at its express speed, whiffing up the dust, and trailing its smoke behind, the soot of expended energies; but we do not move with it; we are shunted into a siding, or we are laid up for repairs. And instead of work, it is an enforced rest. Instead of helping others, we are now the objects of solicitude and help. It is not pleasant so to be taught our dependence and helplessness, to have our capital 'I,' which we used to write with sundry little flourishes, now written small, with a dot over it; but it is an experience which at some time or other most of us have known. And after all, may it not be God's way of enriching the life—throwing it into fallow for a season, that from its Sabbath rest it may gain enlarged powers of service, its very

helplessness making it skilled in helpfulness, its very isolation, weakness, and present pain giving it a wealth of sympathy which will cheer and hearten others in the dark and cloudy day? The wind may blow east or west, north or south, but all winds are fair to the delicately-poised vane of the steeple; and all winds are fair, come they as they may, to the heart which rests on that pivotal centre, the sweet Will of God; for the Sabbath year which grew no harvests of its own made fuller and richer the harvests of the after years.

The Fallow Field

The days were bright and the year was young,
As the warm sun climbed the sky;
And a thousand flowers their censers swung,
And the larks were singing high.

For an angel swept on silent wing
To the grave where the dead earth lay;
And the Easter dawned, as the angel Spring
Rolled the rugged stone away.

Then the fields grew green with springing corn,
And some with flowers were bright;
As each day came with an earlier dawn,
And a fuller, sweeter light.

But one field lay from the rest apart,
All silent, lone, and dead;
And the rude share ribbed its quivering heart,
Till all its life had fled.

And never a blade, and never a flower
On its silent ridges stirred;
The sunshine called, and the passing shower—
It answered never a word.

It seemed as if some curse of ill
Were brooding in the air;
Yet the fallow field did the Master's will,
Though never a blade it bare.

For it turned its furrowed face to heaven,
Catching the light and rain;
It was keeping its Sabbath, one in seven,
That it might grow rich again.

And the fallow field had its harvest moon,
Reaping a golden spoil;
And it learned in its ever-brightening noon,
That rest for God was toil.

XV

AMEN ; ALLELUIA !

XV

AMEN; ALLELUIA!

And the four-and-twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.—Rev. xix. 4.

WE will not attempt to explain the setting of these words, for whenever we approach the heavenly glories a mist falls over our eyes, the dazzle of excessive light; and our speech, if not stricken into silence, becomes inarticulate, speaking only in a stammering way. For how is it possible for mortals to speak the language of the immortals? How can we put the new wine of the heavenly kingdom in the old and narrow bottles of our earthly speech? These earthen vessels, distended by new magnitudes and new meanings, must burst, leaving the glories they vainly sought to carry to dissolve into dreams and fantasies. So what is meant by the four-and-twenty elders, or by the four living creatures, as the R.V. more correctly describes them, we cannot say. But as the great

multitude of perfected saints chant their Alleluia, like the voice of many waters and the roll of mighty thunders, the elders respond, as a faint and distant echo, 'Amen, Alleluia!' So much, then, for the context; and now we will take up, as we may, the meaning and order of these two words, as we find their place in Scripture and their practical uses in our lives.

Our word *Amen* is a peculiar word. It stands by itself, forming its own complete sentence; but what part of speech it is grammarians cannot assert positively, for it is verb, substantive, and adverb in one. It is equally at home in all languages, and yet native but to one; but what that is we cannot with certainty affirm. It is the last word of our Bible; it closes—with the exception of the Acts, St. James's Epistle, and the Third Epistle of St. John—each Book of the New Testament; while all through the Old Testament we hear it strike, like a deep-toned bell, above the chancel of the Hebrew psalter, and out on the desert air of the Exodus, before the psalter had begun to be. The first Amen we hear is in Numbers v.; but in Deuteronomy xxvii. we have a whole peal of Amens, as after each of the twelve curses we read, 'And all the people shall say Amen.' Here then we find one of its earlier

meanings. It is a judicial affirmation, something like the 'So help me, God,' of our judicial oaths. But that we find it here in the Pentateuch, already restricted to a sacred use, with the exact form and meaning of our modern word, would almost imply that it had a distinctly Hebrew origin; and etymologically the word seems closely related to the Hebrew 'Emeth,' truth. Indeed, in Isa. lxv. 16, God is spoken of as the 'God of the Amen,' or 'God of truth'; while in 1 Kings viii. 26, the Amen is a verb, meaning to 'verify.' Yet I am inclined to think that we shall find its true origin still further back, in the hoar of Egyptian antiquity. Long before the Hebrews sojourned by the Nile, Amen was one of the chief gods of the Egyptians, occupying in their mythology the place of Jupiter in the later mythologies of Greece and Rome. Six dynasties before the Pharaohs, one line of Egyptian kings had assumed the sacred name Amen; and while in Thebes Amen-Ra was worshipped as the Sun-god, for over two centuries Egypt prospered under the beneficent rule of the Amens; the third Amen leaving behind him great engineering works, digging out Lake Mœris, planning his labyrinth, and building his pyramid. So the Amen would be deeply impressed upon the

Egyptian mind, invested with a kind of sanctity. It would naturally form one of their most solemn oaths; and what is more likely than that it should impress the Hebrew mind as well, becoming embedded in their language as one of their sacred words? But be its origin as it may, I think we may safely set it down as the oldest word in our language, reaching back through the centuries and millenniums to those earliest days, and possibly to those prehistoric times before them; and this, too, with no change of meaning or of form.

I said just now that it was an affirmation, or solemn declaration, a calling upon God to witness; and this was its earlier use, as in Neh. v. 13, where he puts the people under oath to do such and such things, and we read, 'And all the congregation said Amen, and praised the Lord.' Then it became the response of the people to a song of praise, or prayer, or benediction of the minister, as in Neh. viii. 6, where Ezra stands up to read the Book of the Law. As he blessed the Lord, the great God, we read, 'And all the people answered Amen, Amen, with the lifting up of their hands.' And so the word took its place in the order of public worship, but always as the responsive voice of the entire congregation,

as they made the doxology or prayer of the officiating minister their own. If we trace out the word in its New Testament use, it has exactly the same meaning and functions. Jesus uses the word in a sense peculiarly His own; for where we read so frequently, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you,' in the original it is 'Amen, Amen, I say unto you,' as He puts a double emphasis on the statement that follows; and possibly it was because of this frequent use of the word that John, in the Revelation, calls Jesus the 'Amen,' or the Truth. But that the Amen was used as a congregational response is evident from Paul's letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xiv. 16), where he rebukes those who pray or give thanks in an unknown tongue, asking, 'Else if thou bless with the spirit, how shall he that filleth the place of the unlearned say the Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he knoweth not what thou sayest?'

Here, then, is the true place of the Amen. It is something more than a formal conclusion, a ringing-off of the telephone; it is the golden band which binds up the separate petitions in a sort of unity, gathering up into itself the desires and requests of the entire congregation. Nor is it confined exclusively to prayer; for we

find again and again the double 'Amen, Amen,' striking in with the doxologies of the Psalms; while in the words of our text it is a clear antiphon to those eternal Alleluias which the perfected in glory sing. So it is no modern innovation, but a reverting to ancient and scriptural usage, when we close our hymn of praise or prayer with a sustained Amen. It is an appropriate and natural ending; and one which is in equal accord with the canon of a reverent taste and the canon of Scripture.

But while we join in the Amens of the sanctuary, letting heart and voice go out in these diapasons of worship, we may make our life itself an Amen, one deep, prolonged response to the Divine Will. The blind musician,

> Seated one day at the organ,
> Weary and ill at ease,

seeks to recover his 'Lost Chord,' which for a few moments of transport he heard singing in the chancel of his soul; and baffled in his quest he falls back upon the hope that in heaven he will yet find his 'Grand Amen.' But earth can give Grand Amens as well as heaven; and he whose heart is attuned—syntonic, as they say in these telegraphic days—will hear them. Oliver Wen-

dell Holmes did but put a deep truth into poetic language, when he said that 'A flower is an Amen flung from the mute lips of Nature.' And the mute lips of Nature are perpetually throwing off these Amens, striking in, with no false notes or breaks of dissonance, responsive to the higher Will of God. The fields sing to the seas, and the seas sing up to the stars, and the far depths respond to the far heights in one sweet, unending Amen. But there is an Amen grander than any Nature can give; for after all she offers but a blind obedience; while we may offer to God the obedience of will, of reason, of thought, of love, a devotion that Nature cannot give; and heaven itself knows no sweeter, grander Amen than the Amen of a surrendered human will, the devotion of a consecrated life, just such a life as we in our different spheres are called to live.

But we must pass to our second word, *Alleluia*. Now it seems strange that this word, which is so frequent in our modern psalmody, whose four liquid syllables mark for us the very highest notes that Praise can reach, should be found so seldom in the Bible. It only occurs four times, and only in this one chapter of Revelation. It is, however, a pure Hebrew word, native to the

Old Testament, where we always render it, 'Praise ye the Lord.' And this accounts for its double form; the 'Alleluia' being its New Testament or Greek form, and 'Hallelujah' its Old Testament or Hebrew form. And this note is constantly recurring in the music of the Psalms, especially in the closing Psalms. Indeed, we might call the last five Psalms the Hallelujah Psalms; for you will note that each begins with a Hallelujah, while at its end it drops down to its key-note, closing as it began with a Hallelujah. And now, in the vision of the Seer, these earthly words, so sacred, deep, and clear, the language of our holiest moments when other words fail us, are caught up into the music of heaven, set in the eternal anthems of sinless angels and perfected saints. So closely related are our earthly and heavenly life; and so near are we always to the Church of the First-born. True, our songs are set in the lower keys, sometimes, in the changing and depressing conditions of earth, a plaintive minor; and sometimes we allow the music to be too widely spaced, with intervals of silence too prolonged. But with all this, the songs of earth and the songs of heaven move in the same lines and speak the same tongue, circling with their Amens and Alleluias about

the throne—that throne in whose bright shadow we find our earthly task, as we shall find our heavenly bliss, the throne where He sits and reigns who is Eternal Light and Eternal Love.

But how few and faint our Alleluias are! Sometimes we slip them altogether; and sometimes, when they should be loud and clear, we speak them in a halting, stammering way. But this should not be, and it need not be. The silent harps are on the willows of Israel's exile, by the river of Babylon, where they sit down to weep. But when they gird up their loins and turn their faces Zionward, all the lost music comes back into their lives, and the very desert resounds with their songs. And our songs would be clearer and more sustained were our faces set steadfastly Zionward, and were our hearts set only upon God; for it is when we forget God, or we doubt God—when, instead of lifting up our eyes to the everlasting hills, we look downward to a disappointing world, and to an unworthy, unstable self—that the songs falter and the Alleluias fail. Probably, too, our Alleluias would be more frequent did we but observe the heavenly order, setting the Amen first, and learning it well; for, when we come to think of it, we cannot frame the Alleluia until we have learned to say the

Amen. We must rest in God before we can rejoice in God. There must be acquiescence before there can be quiescence; but let God's Will be fully accepted, and the praises which were frozen and silent begin to flow and sing. So from an accepted sorrow new joys are born; and deep in the heart of a consecrated grief are formed new springs of happiness, which will throw their threads of blessing and of music down all the after years. As Wordsworth writes, 'The tears which destroy the beauty of the outward man, channel his cheek, cut his features with the sharp gravure of anguish, are doing a glorious work on the spirit within, which is becoming fresh with all young and loving thoughts.' Jesus Himself had sung His Alleluia in the guest-chamber, but He could not sing it in the Garden; for there He was treading the winepress alone in His bitter agony, and treading it for us; but the moment He said Amen, 'Thy will, not Mine, be done,' the agony ceased, and Gethsemane had become a paradise, with ministering angels all around, and the whispers of Alleluias on the midnight air. And let our heart be set on doing the Will of God, or suffering that Will if He should so choose, accepting the cross He asks us to bear for a season, and we shall hear a heavenly music—

unseen angels singing in the sky, and making the heart a sanctuary, all lighted up by a changeless love and vocal with sweet psalms. Ah, soul, learn the Amen well, and speak it from the heart, and the Alleluias will come sweetly and easily; and if over your hill Mizar the shadows linger long, and the Alleluias for a brief season are silent, this will be your song, the prelude of higher songs yet to follow: 'Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance and my God.'

And now may I ask, What is the setting of your life? Are you seeking to make it one true and deep Amen, one glad response to the divine Will? The spirits of the perfected offer ceaseless praise, an unbroken service. Nature, day and night, with sleepless vigil, keeps the watch of the Lord, her ten thousand voices answering each other in one perpetual anthem, as the stars sing their sweet chorales from the skies, and the waves chant their Alleluias by the shore. Will you not take your part in these sacred harmonies? Is your will only to be unresponsive to the Higher Will, or openly defiant of that Will? And instead of making your life an anthem, some *Benedictus* or *Magnificat*, is it to be but a discord of false notes and broken times, closing

with a *Miserere*? Ah, Heaven hopes better things of you than that, as surely it deserves something better. Ask, then, the good Spirit to attune your heart, adjusting your will, which has been selfish and wayward, to the Will of God. Ask Him to reveal the Son in you, to show you Jesus Christ as the world's Saviour and your own; and as Handel's *Messiah* finds its natural climax in the grand 'Hallelujah Chorus,' so will your life, redeemed and now possessed by Christ, inspired by His Spirit, be a lesser *Messiah*, or at any rate a 'Hallelujah Psalm,' with undertones of Amens and Alleluias running through all its variations on to its close, until it is transposed and set to the higher keys of the perfected life beyond. So shall we find our prepared place, and have some humble voice in the fuller Alleluias of the skies, in the song eternally new. *Amen.*

XVI

THE PROVIDENCE OF EMPIRE

XVI

THE PROVIDENCE OF EMPIRE

A land which the Lord thy God careth for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.—DEUT. xi. 12.

WITH these and other like words did Moses cheer the heart of Israel, as beyond the desert they sought their Land of Promise—the land which none of them had seen, save Joshua and Caleb, but which, in the sure providence of God, was destined to be theirs. Measured by square miles it was but a small territory, only the size of Wales. It had a seaboard, but no harbour; and it possessed no navigable river, only the useless Jordan, whose waters, flowing swiftly down the rapids, buried themselves in the Dead Sea. Such was the land which God had separated to Himself, insulating it, as it were, by mountains, wilderness, and sea; and which, by His singular providence, He gave to His people as their lasting inheritance; the land which gave us this Divine Word, this Tree of Life, 'whose leaves are for the healing of the

nations'; the land which offers to all peoples and to all times the sacred memories and the priceless blessings of its Calvary.

So much, then, for the historical setting of our text, and now we will step from ancient history to modern. You may call it, perhaps, a stepping down from the sacred to the profane, or secular; but all histories are sacred. Whatever hand may carry these tables, the hand which writes upon them is the unseen hand of God; for it is, as Paul declared to the Athenians, 'God that made the world . . . hath made of one blood all nations of men . . . and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.' And so it is in no way of sacrilege or presumption, but in the exercise of a legitimate right, that, using this Mosaic text, we call your attention to *the Providence of God, as seen in the Building of our Empire.*

And first we must notice the Geographical setting of our land, its insular position; for a nation's life and destiny are greatly affected by the bounds of its habitation, whether those bounds lie under favourable or under depressing skies, whether they are narrow and restricted or easily capable of expansion. Ruskin says, in his *Bible of Amiens*, 'No matter who rules a

country, no matter how it is formally divided, eternal bars and doors are set to it by the mountains and seas, eternal laws enforced over it by the clouds and stars.' These are true words of our seer, full of deep meaning; and how strikingly they are illustrated by the histories of our land! There was a time in the remote past when Britain was joined to the continent of Europe, forming its outlying cape. There was no break in the dense forests which swept from the Rhine to the Thames, and animals now found only in the far south roamed amid a tropical vegetation. Then came one of those cataclysms of nature which are only recorded on the pages of the rocks. The area now covered by our English Channel subsided and disappeared, and the chalk cliffs of Dover were severed from the chalk cliffs of France by twenty-two miles of sea. So did Providence detach our land from all other lands, making it an island, 'the precious stone set in the silver sea,' as Shakespeare calls it, and so giving us an environment and individuality of our own. In the earlier centuries this detachment from other peoples seemed almost to set us at a disadvantage, shutting us off from those civilizing and christianizing influences which were moving over

Southern Europe; and there is a tone of commiseration in Virgil's words, as he speaks of the Britons as *penitus toto diversos orbe*, 'utterly separate from the whole world.' But, humanly speaking, we owe almost everything to that isolation and solitariness to which a kind Providence forced us; for certainly we owe something of our national character, and a great deal of our power, to our insular position. What Motley wrote of the United Provinces is even more true of our own country, 'The sea, which beat like an inveterate enemy against their shores, had been subdued and made a useful servant.' And the sea has befriended and in a thousand ways served us; guarding our shores as standing armies could not, giving us the silver harvests of our toil, binding us in close bonds to the remotest shores of earth, making those remotest shores tributary to our wealth, giving us the freedom of the wide earth, and putting in the heart of the Briton a world-spirit, which makes him equally at home whether he sleeps beneath the Southern Cross, or where the northern borealis lights up his Canadian snows.

So did the hand of God shape our bounds, giving us east, west, north, and south an extended coast-line, with in-curving bays, roomy

harbours, and tidal, navigable rivers stretching inland. But suppose our island had been in latitudes of northern cold, with long and severe winters, allowing only a stunted vegetation, and locking up our rivers and harbours with floes of ice for one half of the year. How different would have been our histories! How altered the aspect of our land, with its brief summers, its scanty harvests, and its scattered and comparatively scarce population! Do not think that we are making an impossible or even improbable supposition. The supposition is a most natural one; for these climatic conditions are just the conditions which in the usual order of things we should expect. Some time ago one of our Canadian liners was ice-bound in the harbour of St. John's, Newfoundland. The wisest skill of her officers was baffled, and the power of her engines set at nought by the pack ice which gripped her close, and whose tremendous pressures could have crumpled up her iron plates as if they had been cardboard. This was at St. John's, just one month before midsummer. But London is further north than St. John's by some degrees. Our latitude is the latitude of Labrador, that sterile, ice-bound coast, where the conditions of life are so severe and exacting. What makes

the difference? In latitude 51° north, why does Nature offer us easier terms? Why should our coast-line be all open and free, when Labrador is ice-bound, and the Baltic is for so many months closed to commerce, and Vladivostock, which is some degrees farther south than we, is for months locked up by the ice? Ah, here we see a providence beneficent and wonderful. Issuing from the Gulf of Mexico is a remarkable current, or sea-river, called the Gulf Stream, its indigo-blue waters heated by tropic suns to 85 degrees. Keeping its own course, banked in by the colder waters of the sea, with which it does not seem to mingle, it sweeps, with a varying rate of movement, up by the American coast. Then, veering eastward, it flows across the Atlantic, distributing about our shores, from its warmer waters, the heat of a tropical sunshine, which fell some four thousand miles away. England is thus a sort of conservatory, as it were, glazed in from the freezing currents from the north, and kept warm in ways which are altogether exceptional, and which we might call artificial, were it not so wonderfully natural. To that Gulf Stream, whose channel across the Atlantic the hand of Providence has scooped out, we owe more than we can tell. The amenities of our genial climate,

the abundance of our rainfall, the affluence of life, yea, even our histories, we owe to the influences, so kindly and so constant, of the Gulf Stream; and were it not for its beneficent offices, keeping open our ports and the channels of our trade, one half of our teeming population could not exist at all, and the other half would have but a hard and straitened life, battling with the rigours of a sub-Arctic clime.

Not only has Heaven given us in these strange ways our softer climate and kindlier skies, it has given us a wealth of mineral, so varied and vast, that we doubt whether there is an equal area in all the world so amply and lavishly endowed. One eminent scientist has stated that 'England is an epitome of the geology of almost the whole of Europe'; and another has said, 'Nearly all the formations of the earth's crust are to be found, in layers more or less thick, in different parts of England.' We sing

Thy bountiful care, what tongue can recite?

and was it not a bountiful Providence which hid such treasures in our soil—treasures which, over and above our own need, we have been pleased to share with less favoured peoples? But this mineral endowment—our deposits of iron, our

vast beds of coal, our large reserves of salt—has laid the foundation of our wealth; while it has given us a foremost place in arts and manufactures, as it has contributed largely to our political power.

And if we consider the Ethnological conditions of our land, we shall find an over-ruling Providence here. What meant those early immigrations, as again and again a stream of foreign life flowed in upon our shores, and, drifting inland up our rivers, claimed a settlement and life among us? They come, the Romans from the south, bringing law and language, and offering some compensation for its pagan worship by bringing in the Christian faith. They come, Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Danes, and Normans, dropping their names along our valleys, and eventually coalescing to build up a new race, altering the nation's physique and the nation's character. It is not safe to guess what our country would have been had its early Britons been unmolested, but we may safely say that the English character would not have been what it is to-day. The very name England, or Angle-land, shows that they became the predominant partners in the business of nation-building; and many of the characteristics of the modern English can be

traced to those hardy sea-king's sons and daughters from over the sea. It is to them, probably, we owe our mechanical ability, our manufacturing skill; and possibly those roving propensities which have made us the great colonizers of the world. And it is doubtless to this blend of divers strains that we owe the indomitable will, the robustness, the persistence, the straightforwardness which so characterize the English people, and which led Goethe to say of them, 'There is no halfness about them; they are complete men.' The hand of Providence was thus on the nation's cradle at its birth; and as you see the glitter of Roman steel, as you see the flash of oars across our northern seas, as Jutes, Danes, and Angles, by some strange impulse, are drawn westward to our shore, it is that same Hand, throwing its shuttles, and threading life with life, to make a new people for Himself, and to make the world's histories and destinies.

Again, if we take the History of our land during these later centuries we cannot fail to see the working of another Power in our national affairs. It is the Throne behind the throne, where He sits by whom kings reign and princes decree judgement, whose sovereign purposes move on

to their fulfilling, however dynasties may fall, or cabinets change, or the generations of men may come and go. Said Pitt, when Parliament was offering him the nation's thanks for the conquest of Canada, 'The more a man is versed in business the more he finds the hand of Providence everywhere.' And so he does. In the word-play of our parliaments, in the clash of opinion, in the see-saw ups-and-downs of parties, steadying and overruling all is that 'divinity which shapes our ends,' as it shapes our beginnings; and which, in spite of mistakes and weaknesses, has brought us to the wider liberties and richer fortunes of to-day.

We will only allude to one event, though it is but one of scores of similar interventions: the Spanish Armada. Spain had set her heart upon the conquest of Britain, and the whole of Catholic Europe stood with her. Its 'invincible' Armada swept proudly up our Channel, a hundred and thirty ships, carrying thirty thousand men, and bringing three hundred monks and priests, with their instruments of torture, to set up the dread Inquisition on our shores. To meet this vast and elated host England could only muster eighty vessels, fifty of which were scarcely larger than a present-day yacht, and only four of them were

equal to the smallest of the Spanish galleons. Tremendous odds! But England had unseen allies, who fought for her from above. The wind drove the Armada up-Channel, where the vessels fouled and collided with each other; while the little English fleet, hanging on their rear, poured into them a raking, demoralizing fire, which threw them into a panic. Ship after ship was captured or sunk, and the remnant, reduced still more by the storms of the North Sea, returned by the Orkneys to Spain, fifty-four vessels battered and shattered, and leaking through every seam. That was a critical moment of England's history; for had the Armada succeeded, England would have become a second- or third-rate Catholic country, under the domination of Spain, and ruled from Rome by that Pope who had excommunicated her Protestant Queen. That England did not become Catholic, with her thought stifled, and her liberties stolen and pawned to a foreign state, we owe, in part, to our brave Howard and Drake, to the skill and daring of our fleet; but we owe more to the kind offices and helps of Heaven. It was, as the inscription upon Drake's monument at Plymouth tells us, in the significant words of Moses' older song, 'Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea

covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters.'

So has it been in all the growths of our Empire. It has come to us, not through any design or plan of conquest; it has been for the most part put into our hands by the force of circumstances. Circumstances, we say; but circumstances are but pawns of the higher play on the wider, chequered spaces of the earth, moved here and there by an unseen Hand, which never mistakes, or makes a false move.

We did not discover Canada; nor were we first in the field. The French were there before us, determined, too, to block any further advances of our colonies in that direction. But that night, when Wolfe, getting out of his sick-bed, led his handful of British soldiers in single file up the sheer cliffs of Abraham's Heights, charging and routing the French, who greatly outnumbered them, it was the fateful hour for Canada. Had the French proved victorious, it would have meant that Canada had been a Catholic colony of Catholic France. But that was not to be, and Heaven prevented it; and when our troops broke through the French barrier, they had, as Green tells us, 'unconsciously changed the history of the world.'

So, too, with Australia. We did not reach that island-continent till eighty-two years after Torres had sailed through the Straits which now bear his name; and forty-six years after Tasman had reached the island which now is Tasmania. But though a discovered, it was still an unappropriated land. The Dutch claimed the western portion, and their right was tacitly recognized. The French had claimed the southern portion, and named it *Terre Napoleon*. But neither French nor Dutch took any pains to secure their territory. Their claims lapsed through want of interest; and when England, recognizing its possibilities, annexed the whole of Australia, there was no resort to war and no real protest made.

So with our African Empire. It was preempted by the Dutch, who established there their sturdy Protestant faith. But whatever might be the virtues of the Boers, they made one grave mistake. Their treatment of the natives was, to say the least, unchristian. Their rule over them was the rule of oppression; and this, in the eyes of Heaven, is a grievous offence. How the offence was punished is a matter of recent history. But the South African War, which cost us many wasted millions and many precious lives,

has brought peace and harmony to the rival races, given protection and justice to all native tribes, and has built up for us an empire within the Empire in the United States of South Africa.

Just so was it in India and Egypt. It is a singular fact that the first two possessions we acquired in India were given by grateful rulers to two of our ships' doctors for medical services rendered. We were led into Egypt against our will; and we entered it only as the colleague and ally of France, whose power then was paramount. But France left us to serve alone, with the 'white man's burden' upon our shoulders, which we could neither throw upon another nor lay down. And now we see our Empire steadily extending southward, through the Sudan and Central Africa. Yes, and wherever it extends it makes the deserts to be glad and the wilderness to blossom as the rose. The flag which is the emblem of our power has blazoned on it the symbol of our faith; and wherever that flag, with the Cross in it, is flung to the breeze, it stands for justice and for right, it means light, liberty, and law.

We need scarcely remind you that if the glories of our Empire are great, the responsibilities of Empire are equally great, and we must see that

we bear them well. If our rule over other peoples becomes unjust or oppressive, however weak and degraded they may be, we shall have a doubled smart for all the wrong we inflict upon them. If there is in our rule any complicity with evil, whether for the sake of revenue, or any so-called gain, it will be surely set down to our account, and an unforgetting Nemesis will make us pay the penalty to the uttermost farthing. If, as a people, we should lose our hold on God; if we cease to take life seriously, caring only how we may be amused; if we forsake duty to follow after pleasure; that is, if we lose our faith, we shall lose ourselves, and all we possess that is worth possessing. So while we recall gratefully the memories of the past, as we beat the bounds of our wide Empire, we offer our praise to Him, the King of kings, who has stretched out our lines to the ends of the earth; praying Him to make us and keep us fitted for the great honours He has given us, and for the great tasks which He Himself has imposed.

God of our fathers, known of old!
Lord of our far-flung battle-line!
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine;
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget!

XVII

UNDER THE JUNIPER

XVII

UNDER THE JUNIPER

But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper-tree; and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough, now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers.—1 KINGS xix. 4.

IT is a far remove and a far drop from the eighteenth to this nineteenth chapter, from Mount Carmel to this wilderness. There we see the prophet at his boldest and his best, as single-handed he champions the faith his people have forsaken, throwing down his gage of battle before people, king, and priests. Here we see him at his weakest and his worst, as, like a tired and peevish child, he throws himself on the lap of his mother-earth, and, disappointed with the past, and despairing of the future, he seeks to leave a world he cannot mend. There he was the man of God, vested with superhuman powers, calling the fire from the sky and the rain from the sea; here he is the weak child of

man, of like passions as ourselves, borrowing from the juniper a little friendly shade to shield him from that same sky which now mocks him with its strange silence and its burning glare. Such was the temporary but dark eclipse of Elijah's courage, hope, and faith; and as we see him beneath the juniper, longing for death as the hireling longs for the shadow, it is as if the granite rock had suddenly fallen to pieces, becoming a light dust, that any wind might sport with.

But the juniper of the desert is no rare exotic. Acclimatized to all lands, it stands by most of the roads of life, its thick and drooping foliage casting a deep shade. No song-birds nest or sing in its branches, and all the fruits it bears are the oak-apples of gall. It is the juniper of discouragement, dejection, and depression, with which most lives are more or less familiar—when we get tired of beating up against the wind; tired of hoping against hope; tired of a toil that seems all vain—of promises which have no fulfilment, and of a struggle which has no easement or release. Yes, these crises slip into most lives, when for a time life seems but a weariness and a burden; and our hearts falter, and would fain beat a retreat did we only know where or how. And do not

think it is the cowards only—the weaklings—who know the desert juniper. The best, the very strongest souls have had their times of halting, of perplexity and dark foreboding. Indeed, very few have reached earth's promised lands, the lands of large elevation, of conquest and of plenty, but have had to cross some strip of wilderness—a wilderness which offered junipers in abundance, and which threw forward over the sands some beautiful but deceptive mirage, which vanished as the traveller approached.

There are many roads which lead to the juniper of the desert, but we will now only indicate three, which, perhaps, are the most frequented ways: viz., the Way of physical debility; the Way of mental anxiety; and the Way of spiritual conflict.

In seeking for the cause of Elijah's dejection and despair, we should say that it was, in part, the reaction of excessive labours. Follow the prophet the day of the fire-test on Carmel; keep by his side, entering, as you may, into his feelings, from the first early dawn until he closes the eventful day by running before the royal chariot to Jezreel—a race of fifteen miles in the rain—and you will see that it was a day of extremest tension, and of tasks titanic, almost superhuman.

But it was an overdraft on the bank, which Nature, who always keeps strict accounts, with frequent balancings, resented. Directly there came the inevitable reaction, for physical strength and nervous energy were alike exhausted; and when these are gone, when physically we are in a state of collapse and liquidation, the eye of the seer loses its brightness, the hand its steadiness, and the heart its hope. Our feelings are airy, volatile things, rising and falling with our fluctuating strength, just as surely as the mercury responds to the varying pressures of the atmosphere. When we are overwrought—run down, as we say—our nerve-power enfeebled, we lose confidence in ourselves. Courage oozes away. Little things daunt us, and the mole-hill swells into a mountain. Unequal to any enterprise, we grow listless, despondent, perhaps fretful; taking sombre views of everything, and seeing no brightness anywhere, whether we look within, or out upon a beautiful world, or up to the great skies overhead; while, if we look forward, there is no tomorrow worth living for, no future but of darkening shadows and wintry discontent. And we sit or we lie under our juniper, calling up from the dead past the light of the days that are gone,

and mourning that our lost summer will never come back to us more.

Another way to the juniper is *through mental anxiety*. It was doubtless the rebound of a bitter disappointment which threw Elijah, as it were, off his feet, spent and strengthless on the ground. Evidently he had hoped for much from the fire-ordeal of Carmel; and for one brief hour it seemed as if his brightest hopes would be realized, for he wields an absolute power, commanding the people, and even directing the king. But what has come of it all? Nothing. With all this travail Israel's regeneration has not come. He has done his best, and has not succeeded; he has led on his forlorn hope, and it has failed. What more can he do? He can only ask the Lord to release him from a toil that is fruitless, and from a life which brings but disappointment. So, like Simeon, he, too, chants his *Nunc Dimittis*. But he changes Simeon's indicative into the optative mood, turning it into a prayer; but as Elijah prays that *he* may depart, it is for another and sadder reason: 'for mine eyes have not seen Thy salvation: I have sought it, and it could not be found; I have looked for it, and it has not come.'

Disappointment, failure in our hopes and plans,

always tends to weaken and depress, even when it comes singly. But when they are frequent and long continued they throw us back in utter discouragement, taking the heart out of us, as, etymologically, the word 'discourage' means. We begin to doubt our own powers, and, what is more, to doubt Providence; and we chafe, and grow inwardly angry because Providence seems unkind, secretly, as we imagine, working against us; thwarting our purposes, disarranging our plans, and throwing our life into a complete tangle. But the easiness, the smoothness of a path, is no proof of its divineness; it rather indicates the contrary. The highways of God are not generally on the dead level, like the asphalted cycle-track. They run up and down, like Napoleon's great road over the Alps, through the tunnelled, levelled mountain, and over exalted valleys; and few are the climbers who reach the fairer Italy and the perpetual summers there who have not met arduous toil on the way, difficulties that taxed their utmost strength, and disappointments many, blowing cold across their path, and almost beating them back with flurries of blinding snow. Even our late Laureate, whom the world, when it got to know him, delighted to honour, in his earlier

years found but scant appreciation. His 'clear harp of divers tones' struck upon an atmosphere which was chilly and unsympathetic; and in his discouragement Tennyson actually thought of leaving the ungenial skies of England for the sunnier climes of the South. Even the brave, intrepid explorer, Nansen, the man of dauntless courage and heroic fath, when locked in the polar ice in the long Arctic winter, at times grew discouraged and sad; and he writes in his diary one day: 'My mind is confused; and the whole thing has got into a tangle. I am worn out; and the proud imaginings that mounted like young eagles, now, like broken-winged, wet crows, leave the sunlit sea, and hide themselves in the misty marshes of despondency.' But Time and Providence brought Tennyson a sweet revenge; and Time and Patience brought Nansen the open sea, with 'home, sweet home,' and the world's loud acclamations.

Still another way to the juniper is *the way of spiritual conflict*. And here we must step softly, for we are in the presence of a great mystery. It is an enigma, for the solution of which we must wait for eternity's clearer light, when Heaven 'shall make perfect this imperfect life,' why the sincere child of God, who would not for

worlds willingly disobey, should sometimes be left in gloom and darkness, the prey of a deep despondency. But such is the fact; and some of the strongest and saintliest of Christians have had this shadowed experience more or less prolonged. The gentle Cowper was at times so depressed that life became a burden, from which he longed to be released. One day he determined to take his own life, and he ordered his coachman to drive him to a certain point on the river, where he intended to throw himself in. A fearful thunderstorm, however, met him on the way, with such vivid lightnings that the coachman was alarmed, and, turning round, he set the poet down at his own door. It was as if God's angel had stepped softly under his juniper, and touched him on the side. He saw in the singular providence God's hand stretched out to rescue him. The snare was broken; and exchanging the spirit of heaviness for the garment of praise, he sat down and wrote the hymn which has cheered many a depressed and distressed Christian since:

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.
. . . . . .

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His works in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

And this brings us to our second point: *The way out from the juniper.* For there is a way out, as Elijah proved, and as many a servant of the Lord has found since. And one way out is the way of relaxation. God lays His tired child down, puts him to sleep in the shade, and then gives to His beloved, in sleep, refreshment, strength, and hope. And there is wisdom, there is science in this method, simple as it may appear. It is common sense, and common sense is divine sense. It is only as we sleep night by night that we recover the bloom and strength the yesterday took from us. It is as we lie helpless and unconscious that Heaven's angel of strength comes and sets by our side fresh oil for the spent lamp, and fresh draughts of the waters of life. And what a tonic is the balm of sleep! How different things look when we have slept upon them! What in the dusk seemed a croaking raven with black wings, in the fresh morning light is some silver-winged dove, or, maybe, a bird of paradise! What at nightfall, when we were jaded and unnerved, seemed a stone of stumbling or of difficulty which we could not

possibly surmount, when the morning light strikes it, lo! is a Memnon's stone that sings to us, or some milestone, whose friendly finger points our way. So if our depression is caused by physical debility, we may, nay, we must, fall back upon physical remedies. Have we been burning our energies too freely, making the wheels spin round too fast on the line of life? We must 'slow down' a bit, or we must pull up altogether and shunt into the siding, that the wheels may have time to cool. We must take time, or make time, for recreation; seeking relief in change of air and change of scene; opening fresh channels for our thoughts; for tired feet will caper a bit when they are turned into fresh pastures. Seek, then, the haunts of Nature, for she is a wonderful nurse, with all sorts of elixirs and anodynes in her lap. Let her soothe you with her music, let her spray you with her whiffs of ozone from the sea or moor; and it will quiet the strained nerves, brace up the flagging energies, and make life's sluggish current sparkle and sing again as it runs on over the wheel of your daily grinding.

But if Nature, with her baths of sunshine, can restore the lost bloom, and if, with her music, she can charm and drive away the evil spirit of des-

pondency, Society, too, may give us relief and solace—closer contact with our fellows. Elijah was all alone by the juniper; and possibly he never had found it—making it a booth under which he could do a little fret-work—had he not left his fellows behind, and even left his faithful servant at Beersheba. And then his feeling of loneliness oppressed him. His isolation became a desolation; and this was his wail, the voice crying in his wilderness, 'The children of Israel have thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away.' But this was not true. The fact was, Elijah had shunned the ways of men, shutting himself up to himself, becoming a recluse, a solitary. And the solitary who lives in himself is always moody and morose; like the broody hen, which, nesting in the shade, clucks her monologue over eggs that are addled. The Germans have a proverb, 'The hawk takes first the dove that flies alone'; and the soul that lives alone, wrapped up in itself, can never take its bearings correctly, never see things truly, and it falls an easy prey to its own evil moods and rapacious fancies—just as he who turns his back upon the sun will see one thing vividly, that is, his own magnified shadow.

But this is just the tendency of all depression; it is to separation and isolation. The depressed soul has a feeling that it has lost touch with the world of humanity, which goes on its glad and easy way, with no thought for the wounded and sore who have fallen out from its ranks and dropped to the rear. The wounded heart, like the wounded deer, makes for the solitude, shutting itself up in the bracken, and shutting itself out from the sympathy and solace its fellows would be only too glad to give. And this is exactly what we must not do. We cannot afford this terrible loss, the loss of society. We must keep in touch with our fellows; and never do we so need the hand-grip of brotherly sympathy as when our spirits are disquieted and depressed, and our better self is breaking down, demoralized by frequent disappointment and defeat. On the faces of our friends—if we can look up so far—we shall see the sunlight play in the smiles of love and tenderness, smiles which are heaven's flashing signals, telling of hope and help. Keep in touch with humanity, and you will have more hope of it; it will be better, perhaps seven thousand times better, than you in your dark moods imagine. Keep in touch with humanity, and it will help you. Cultivate its wider interests, its world-

interests; and, by steering out into the wider seas, you will get clear away from that narrowing, dangerous maelstrom of yourself. Losing yourself in your thoughts of others you will find a better, healthier, nobler self.

But while Nature and Society both may assist us in getting away from the juniper, we shall find in God Himself our great, unfailing, and all-sufficient help. And this was the way Elijah took. The angel, after he had twice given him food, directs him to the Mount of God; and there God meets him, giving him the wonderful apocalypse, the earthquake, the wind, the fire, and then the still small voice—at which Elijah wraps his mantle about his face and worships. And he never goes back to the juniper more. He goes instead back to the unfinished task, to summon prophets and to anoint kings; and at last, beside the Jordan, Heaven's chariot and horses of fire come down to bear him home. So the prophet who under the juniper had prayed for death and a lonely burial in the sands, does not see death at all, but passes through the gate of the immortals to the highest heaven.

Brethren, the nearest way always from the desert juniper is by the Mount of God; and life has no dusty road, no field of toil, no stretch of

desert sand, but it slopes up to some Mount of God, and touches heaven. And how small earth appears when God's heavens are close upon us, all bright, and strangely vocal! How brief and insignificant these years of time, when we hear the boom of the vast eternities! O tired, sad soul, climb up the Mount of God! Get on these uplands of faith and promise, these hills of light and joy! The juniper does not grow here; but instead you have the cedar and the palm. Here are trees of life, whole forests of them, and sweet valleys of asphodel! Get up on the Mount, and let God speak to you. He will not chide you, save that He may ask, 'What didst thou there under the juniper? Why didst thou doubt and falter when I was with thee, and My bright heavens were overhead? Why didst thou complain at the task I set, the burden I appointed? And why didst thou seek to throw away a life which was given and redeemed, that it might serve Me and My world? Ah, child, I forgive thee, but do not doubt Me again. Go back to your unfinished task; and when thou hast done that I will give thee the parted Jordan, and the rest that remaineth, even heaven's sweet and eternal peace.'

Not now, my child, a little more rough tossing,
A little longer on the billow's foam;
A few more journeys in the desert darkness,
And then the sunshine of thy Father's home!

One little hour, and then the glorious crowning,
The golden harp-strings and the victor's palm!
One little hour, and then the hallelujah,
Eternity's long, deep thanksgiving psalm!

XVIII

NO MORE SEA

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NO MORE SEA

And there was no more sea.—Rev. xxi. 1.

THIS language sounds somewhat strange to us islanders, a sea-born and a sea-faring people. The voices of the sea are to us familiar and welcome voices, and year by year our countrymen of the Midlands come in their thousands to the seaside, as to their shrine of rest and worship. And so the sea is associated with our pleasures and recreations, and again and again has it thrown its threads of gold across the sober and somewhat sombre weft of life. The sea has given us, as perhaps nothing else can, thoughts and conceptions of the infinite, in its illimitable expanse, its horizon ever receding as we approach to meet it. What the sea is to the divine mind we may learn from the geographical fact that when God made our world as the habitation of man, He gave three-quarters of its entire surface to the sea, reserving but one-fourth for the dry land. That it is so shows

that it must be so. It is a great necessity. Without it the dry land would be dry land indeed, a vast Sahara, without flower, or fruit, or solitary blade of grass. Life itself would be impossible. Nay, the sea has entered as a very important factor into the history of the world, as Captain Mahan has lucidly shown in his *Sea-power in History*. The keys of empire are kept generally within a few miles of her coast, as in ancient Greece and Rome, or in modern England; and such is its power, such the advantages it gives, that nations to-day are almost ready to fight for a strip of sea-coast, seeking by force of arms what Nature has denied them. But here the heavenly seer, beholding through the rent veil the new heavens and the new earth which lie beyond the horizon of mortality, tells us, 'And there was no more sea.' What does he, what can he mean?

Well, if we take these words first in their lowest, literal meaning, they tell us of *the altered conditions of life up in the new heavens, or the new earth, as it is called*. In this present life we have the mortal joined to the immortal; we have a spiritual nature clothed upon with a material, physical substance, and everything around us is adapted to our lower, physical nature. This body

of ours is of the earth, earthy, subject to physical laws; and to place a being wholly spiritual upon a material world, subject to material conditions, would be an anomaly and discord. But when this body is laid down and left behind; when this material body, sown in corruption, unfolds and blossoms into a body wholly spiritual, then, of course, all the conditions of life are changed, and the new earth must be adapted to its changed inhabitants. What that new life may be we cannot tell, for we have no senses that can comprehend it; no language that can describe it; for all these inspired descriptions of it are no more than far-off hints and shadows. You cannot gaze up at the sun except through a darkened glass. That glass does not describe the sun; it does not bring it any nearer; it simply tones down the excessive glory, so adapting it to our weak vision. So these descriptions of the heavenly life, these figures of harps, and crowns, and palms, are nothing more than the darkened glasses of human speech, through which we may look up to the glories which are insufferable and ineffable. They tone down the excessive brightness, so that our weak earthly vision may take it in. And where shall there be place for the sea in yon life, where we have bodies swift as the light and bright as

the sun? Where room for the sea, when every want is satisfied and every hope fulfilled? Where room for the sea, where health blooms on every cheek, and the inhabitant says no more, I am sick? Ah, there is no room for it, no need of it now; and so it passes away, caught up by the fervent heat of the world's dissolving fires.

I say, all this we may learn from the surface reading of these words; but I venture to say that this was not all that the apostle meant. His words are like the crystal waters of a lake, vastly deeper than they seem. You will doubtless have noticed how characteristic is the language of St. John, how symbolical and intensely spiritual it is. Just compare the Gospels of the Synoptists, as they are called, with St. John's Gospel. They give us the historical Christ; John gives us the spiritual Christ. Theirs is the Gospel of the humanity; his is the Gospel of the divinity. And besides, in interpreting Scripture, we not only need to remember the characteristics of the writer; we want, as much as is possible, to put ourselves in his position, looking, as it were, through his eyes. Let us do so now, climbing up the desolate Patmos shores, and reading them in the solitariness of John's exile. And now what is it they tell me, in their farther off but deeper

meaning? Why, they say that *in yon heavenly life there will be no more suffering caused by sin.* Tell me, what disturbing force is this which has swept across the life of the apostle? this rude storm which has driven him out from the quiet anchorage of Ephesus, and cast him stripped and bruised upon a lonely, desolate shore? What is it? Providence? Well, Providence is a large word, a convenient basket into which we cast most of life's riddles: and doubtless there was a providence here, as there is everywhere. God is present here at Patmos, not as a spectator, looking distantly and coldly on His servant's sorrows. No; He is intensely interested, and intimately near, breaking the force of the blow, soothing the smart with divine consolations, sending His angel-messengers with words of hope and comfort, and then giving him this wonderful apocalypse. Yet, let us not mistake. Did God tear John away from his ministry at Ephesus, throwing him up on this barren isle, and locking him in by the leagues of sea? No; it is not God; Rome did it; Nero did it by imperial edict; but God was not in that edict, any more than He was in Herod's sword. He was before it, behind it, above it, but not within it. No, it is Evil, and the forces of Evil, which have come upon John's

quiet life with such deadly impact. And as John sits by his Patmos watch, all scorched by these passing fires of persecution, God is not far away; the still small Voice will speak directly, but God is not in the fire. Now then, can you enter into the exile's feelings? Can you hear his thoughts speak, as he paces the solitary cliff? Shut out from everything that is dear, this wide sea, this cruel, mocking sea hems him in on every side. These waves, like lines of sleepless sentinels, keep their melancholy beat along the shore, as if to guard his ocean prison; and if the birds do sing on Patmos, their song is all drowned in the swash and swirl of the never-resting, mocking waves. And as John scans the wide horizon, to find nothing but the sea, with no path open of escape, he lifts his eyes to the skies, whose path *is* open to the redeemed and freed spirit, and he puts his own experience, his hope, his heart into his prophecy of the heavenly life, 'And there was no more sea,' no more the triumph of evil and the blight of sin. But the good shall triumph there, if not here, where there is no more sin, and 'no more sea.'

What may be the exceeding weight of glory our good Lord is reserving for us we cannot tell. Even in the third heavens Paul beheld

such visions as it was not possible to utter; and if Paul's language failed him even on these lower heights, who will unfold to us the glories of the heaven of heavens? Even John is baffled, and all he can say is, 'Behold, it doth not yet appear what we shall be.' This we know, however, that in the heavenly life there will be the absence of everything that can cause anxiety, grief, and pain. I do not refer so much to pain of body, as to the deeper, keener pains of heart. But how much of life's anxiety and pain is caused by the presence of Sin around us! It meets us on every side. It ruffles our calmest, smoothest hours. It lunges against us with terrific force, disarranging our plans, destroying our hopes, and making us cringe and smart. Oh, if Sin could be swept out of our world; if on some holy mount humanity itself could be transfigured, until its garments were white and glistering, and its language unselfish and pure, what a different world ours would be! How different our life! Talk of the millennium, why, we should get far beyond that! Our life would swing forward into the very paradise of God. Jealousy and distrust would be removed, our standing armies would be disbanded, our navies broken up, and that 'Peace on earth'

would be something more than a song in the sky. Fears of lawlessness and wrong taken away, our hearts would confide in man with a perfect confidence; our doors would be unlocked and open as our hearts. Crime banished, vice extinct, and law itself would be reduced to equity. But alas! earth is not like that idyllic paradise. The slime of the serpent is on everything around, and man is not an angel. Why is it that life is such a struggle, business such an anxiety and burden? Is it because of the fluctuations of trade? Not so much that, for these ebbings and flowings of the tide are more constant than we think; we can put them into our calculations and provide for them. But Sin is a force we cannot calculate. We have to contend with the competitions of unscrupulous men, men who will descend to any meanness, who will spoil Hebrews and Egyptians alike to advance what they call their interests. Let us lay down our plans cautiously as we may, we must embark our interests with the interests of others, and their carelessness or dishonesty may wreck all our hopes. When God lays a burden upon us, He somehow fits it to our neck; it does not gall or fret us so; but when Sin lays its burdens upon us, these are the hard ones to bear. David can bear the terrors of the pesti-

lence, for it is God who has done it, and the wings of the destroying angel beat time to the Divine Will. He can rise up and sing when his child dies; and, standing by the dead child, which, born in sin, itself knew no sin, he can sing, 'I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.' But when Absalom sinks down, down into pride, ambition, treachery, and death, David cannot sing now, he can only wail out his passionate grief, 'O Absalom, my son, my son, would God I had died for thee!' But 'there shall be no more sea.' Our heavenly life will flow on, one sweet song, without discord and without break. Not one shred of bitterness will be cast into its cup of overflowing, everlasting joy; for hark! as God's angel speaks, 'There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.'

Again, our text declares, that *there will be no more enforced pauses in our work, or separation from our friends.* John's life had been unusually active. Of calm exterior, he was yet a 'son of thunder,' possessed of a large reserve of force, of surplus energy. He could outrun Peter any day; and in his swift-footedness we may read his entire devotion to his Master. It is said that

if two watches be placed side by side upon some vibrating material their beats will gradually draw nearer to each other, until they beat in unison. Possibly, too, this may be a law of souls. At any rate, John's head lay upon the Master's breast so often and so long their hearts had learned to beat in unison, and between the two there was a perfect synchronism. And though his form fades from our sight in succeeding years, Peter and Paul becoming the prominent and dominant figures, it is the same John still, swift and eager for service, with clear, far-sighted vision, and with the same loving, clinging heart. And John's heart was peculiarly tender, womanly. We read of him as 'leaning on Jesus' breast'; yes, and he was the leaning disciple. Sympathy, affection, were necessities of his life. He was not the palm, which can stand erect and solitary in its desert; he was the vine rather, bearing ripe, rich clusters, but needing earthly supports, and, perhaps, leaning too much on them; for we seldom read of John alone. He is generally associated with Peter, who was a kind of complement of himself; it was the lamb reclining upon the rock.

Now we can understand what the sea meant for him. It was the great divider. It locked him

within its island fortress, removing him from the work in which he so delighted, and to which, humanly speaking, he was so necessary, putting the cold seal of silence upon those lips which were so glad to speak for his Lord. Not only so; it cut him off from all those sympathies and affections from which he drew so much of his strength. The sea to him was a great gulf, the gulf across which the angels of Friendship and of Love could not pass with their greetings; shutting out from him all that was dear and bright in his earthly life, leaving him to an isolation which was worse than death.

We have not time to linger on this thought, or to apply it at any length. But there is a Patmos in most lives, when restraints are put upon our activities, and there comes an enforced pause in our life's work. Worn with the press of labours, and with throngs of unfulfilled duties waiting around the door of our to-morrow, the Master says, 'Come ye apart. You are too much in public. You are having enlarged views of your own importance, as if any man were necessary to My cause. Come ye apart, and learn the lesson of your weakness, your littleness. Your class, is it? I will find some one else to take that. Your pulpit? Well, I can easily fill that; it can

spare you for a while.' And then He takes us apart into some desert of solitude and suffering, shutting us up to Himself. Happy we, if our upper-room of waiting be the upper-room of a new Pentecost, with the rush of heavenly winds and the play of fiery tongues! Happy we, if our Patmos gives us some glorious Apocalypse, so that we come down from our solitudes with shining faces and shining lives! But this is a discipline of earth. Our heavenly life will not have it, will not need it. There our graces will expand and blossom in unclouded light, as we serve Him day and night in His temple. Unbroken service! Unbroken songs!

And how full is our life of these separations! We look back to the companions of our boyhood, but the most of them are gone. We recall the memories of the old house at home; but how altered it is now! How dull and glassy is its window, now that the mother's face no longer lights it up! And where is the circle of lads and bonnie girls who had such games in the firelight, when the sober tasks of the day were over? Some are here, and some are there, and some over the seas sleep in their foreign graves. We meet, we toil together with mingled hopes and fears, and then we go, never again to stand

in the familiar place, never again to join in the sweet songs of Zion, until we sing that same Lamb in hymns above. And such is life; coming, going, we never continue in one stay. But there shall be no more sea; and so we turn to the 'rest that remaineth.' Heaven will give us back all we really lose on earth. Here our bright visions fade, and our 'holy mounts' are left behind; there it will be one long tarrying on the celestial hills, for ever with the spirits of the just made perfect, and 'for ever with the Lord.' Here our hymns die away in silence, and we leave the guest-chamber for dark Gethsemane, and so onward to the grave; there it will be one eternal feast, one endless song, with no Gethsemane to break the music!

No More Sea

No more the ebbing and the flowing
Of the changeful tide;
No more the coming and the going
O'er the waters wide;
Tempests cease, all is peace,
Where there's no more sea.

No more the sinking and the setting
Of the golden sun;
No more the pining and the fretting
Over bright hours run;
All is bright, all is light,
Where there's no more sea.

No more the watching and the weeping
For the 'over due'—
The loved ones who are calmly sleeping
In the waters blue;
Gone the strife, all is life,
Where there's no more sea.

O bells of hope, keep ringing!
The night watch wears away;
O child of faith, keep singing,
Until the break of day!
Heaven is near, Heaven is dear,
Where there's no more sea.

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